

God is always the Giver—unconditionally. That's the rich truth of the Covenant of Creation. Geoffrey Bingham reveals the freedom of the human spirit when it lives according to the way God has shaped us in His image. A redeemed humanity that comes into the fullness of Vocation, lives in the inner Sanctuary of God in His Sabbath Rest, and is incorporated into the community of faith in the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb.

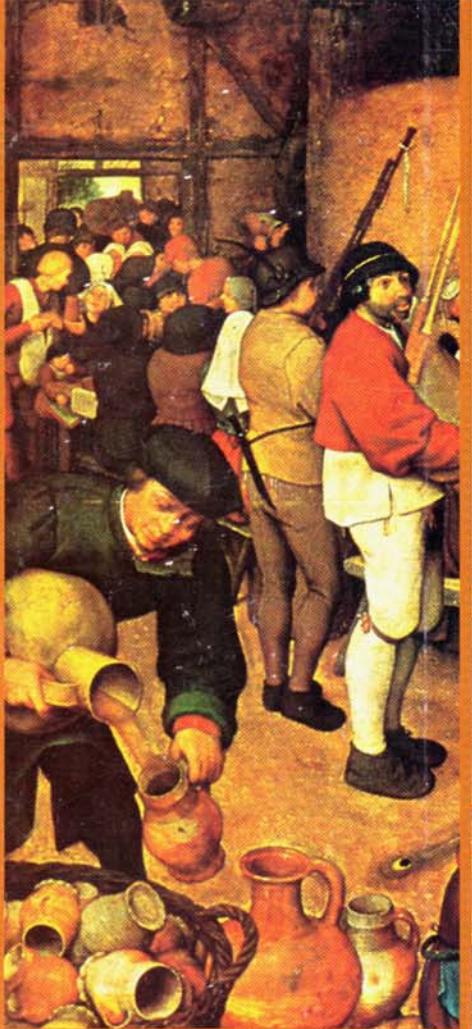
Packaged here for the lay Bible student is some of the best of recent academic theology.

James Packer
Professor of Theology
Regent College, Vancouver.



Geoffrey C. Bingham was a prisoner of war of the Japanese for three years. It was during this time he received the promise from God, "I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord" (Psalm 118:17). After the war he returned to his theological studies and was ordained into the Anglican Church ministry. Upon returning from missionary service in West Pakistan in 1966, he was appointed Principal of the Bible College of South Australia. He later founded New Creation Publications and Teaching Ministry.

His short stories, poems, novels and many theological works have made an active contribution to the Christian world view of his readers.



LOVE'S MOST GLORIOUS COVENANT

Geoffrey C. Bingham

By the same author

All Things of the Spirit

All Things are Yours

Beyond Mortal Love

I Love the Father

The Revelation of St John the Divine

Strong as the Sun

Sweeter than Honey, More Precious than Gold

The Day of the Spirit

The Profound Mystery

Things We Firmly Believe

LOVE'S MOST GLORIOUS COVENANT

Studies in Covenant Theology

BY
GEOFFREY C. BINGHAM

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Noel and the Church family of Redeemer
for sharing their life

FOREWORD

The Covenant of Creation is the natural relationship of God with His entire Creation, and in particular with Man. ‘Let us make Man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion...’

Here is a statement of the most intimate of all relationships that God can have, flowing from the innate unity and commission of the Three Persons of the Trinity. Welling up in love, Creation was the profound expression of the nature of God to which Man could only respond with thanksgiving. Here is no welfare arrangement, no unmerited favour, but sheer gift!

Such a God would never rest content with the seeming frustration of His intentions occasioned by the Fall. And the progressive unfolding of all subsequent Covenants would be a confirmation and a continuing establishment—though of course not a making or remaking—of the original creational Covenant of Love.

Contrary to popular thought, Man is not the consummation of the Creation account. But he is, nevertheless, the agent God has appointed by which the aims of Creation will be realised. In God’s Rest on the seventh day we have an indication that there is a goal, a purpose, to which Creation points. It is what one writer perceives as a call to man to begin history ‘holding firmly in view that the goal of Creation is the event of God’s Sabbath freedom, Sabbath rest and Sabbath joy, in which man, too, has been summonsed to participate’.

The utterances of the Creation in Genesis spelled out the principles by which Man could live as he was created: the Mandate of Vocation; the invitation to enjoy all things of the garden; the Man to keep that garden and—by inference—the man and woman to work together within their communion with God and their mutual communion as the ‘one-flesh’ entity. Herein lie the elements of the Covenant—Vocation, living in God’s Sabbath Rest and Marriage.

And all of these were innately within the Genesis Creation account without any explicit talk of a covenant. This is the refreshing truth that Geoffrey Bingham seeks to clarify for the reader. We’ve violated the loving gift of Creation. We’ve rejected our natural habitat, we’ve cast aside God’s true Presence in our life. What was thought to be a heady freedom has turned out to be a fearful bondage to sin and self.

And yet God has graciously evoked in the New Covenant the response of joyful obedience to ‘the just requirements of the law’. Here is Covenant—Man responding out of love to the love of God in Covenant which comes to mean ‘Love in Creation’, responding to the revealed goodness of God in Creation and to His grace and mercy in Covenant. In the midst of the revelation of the Word and the Spirit we have but one response.

Those who have sat within the sound of Geoffrey Bingham’s teaching recognise that here is no dry abstract theology devoid of reality. He possesses the inspired capacity to draw men into participating in God’s intention—now. Nothing is unrelated to covenant as is shown so clearly in these pages which invite us in our

daily lives to take up partnership in the action of God. We are, as Geoffrey Bingham says, ‘all one as the body of humanity in our relationship with God’. In taking up partnership in God’s action, we are recognising that the primary fact of that humanity is the Covenant of Creation.

Noel Cannon
Castle Hill

February, 1997

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PREFACE

WHAT OF A WORLD COVENANT?

Some of the Great Truths Are Not Heard

One of the marks of our decade is that we seek entertainment and stimulation. There is nothing necessarily wrong with these two elements. Yet, when they become the conditions on which people will read literature, hear what is said or view what is depicted, then it means we become a shallow generation indeed.

In 1985 Neil Postman wrote a book entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.¹ One reviewer commented, 'The ironically titled chapter "Teaching as an Amusing Activity" ought to be read by every educator contemplating handing over the teaching function to images on a television screen'. His book selects teachers and preachers who seek to stimulate and hold their audiences by 'easy speaking' which makes for 'easy listening'. Humour is one of the great weapons used to crack the passivity of listeners. Of course it is a simple matter to be critical, and many speakers are desperate to get their people to listen. They believe they have something to say. It may well be that some speakers and preachers are difficult to listen to. The real question is, 'What ever method I may use, what am I saying? What is the substance of my teaching and what is its point?'

¹ My copy is the edition published in 1987 by Methuen, London.

Jesus knew the problem of communicating truth, and often cried—sometimes loudly—‘He that has an ear to hear, let him hear’.

He certainly never went about tickling people’s ears, but no one could accuse Him of being dull! The fact is that some of us cannot believe we are saying, or hearing, life-transforming truth. Jesus said, ‘The words that I have spoken to you, they are spirit and they are life’. They were that, but He had to tell His audience that this was the case and the result was that ‘many of his disciples drew back and went no longer with him’.²

Hearing a Great All-Embracing Truth

A person who regularly reads Scripture—one who has spent years in this pursuit—will have recognised that the word ‘covenant’ is not only often used, but that it is of the very essence of the Bible. Without it much of the Scriptures is not properly understood. One only has to pause and ask oneself the question, ‘What do I understand by covenant? How does it figure in my daily life? Is it relevant to me? Do I delight in it, and even view it with great awe and satisfaction? Does history make sense in the light of it?’. The answer to these questions will show us what value—or lack of it—the theme of covenant has for us.

One could conceivably preach covenant with ‘eloquent wisdom’ and ‘lofty words of wisdom’ and ‘plausible words of wisdom’³ and maybe hold listeners by a well-placed argument, or an entertaining ability to

hold listeners, but the straight fact of covenant might not thereby be told. Suppose, on the other side, the teacher were to say, ‘All of mankind, from the beginning to the end is under God’s Covenant of Creation. God is concerned with every human individual. He loves all, and has embraced them under this Covenant’. Would that resonate for many? Would some say, ‘This is a pearl of great price, I will sell all to purchase it’, or, ‘This is a stunning truth that I have never even sensed before. I will drop tools and pursue it until I discover what it means’? I believe some would respond but others in the same listening situation might think it quite dull.

It could be that for some teachers the idea of covenant has never shone in golden letters. It has been a biblical emphasis that has never quite gripped them, a theological truth that has not seemed central to their system of doctrine. If so I think this is a pity.

Take, for instance, the problems which confront us today of multicultural and multi-religious societies. Do we have some understanding that helps us not only to live together but also to have a wide comprehension of the nature of Man across the whole spectrum of races, cultures and religions? Can we go behind the whole variety of these things and come to the essential fact that every one of us is in covenant relationship with God? Do we comprehend that primary to life is the reality that before we are people of different races, of different religions, of different cultures, we are all one as the body of humanity in our relationship with God? Without putting down the differences we have named, do we realise the primary fact of our humanity is this Covenant of all Creation?

² See John 6:63–69; Luke 8:4–21. In the latter passage Jesus is really saying, ‘Only he truly hears what I am saying who does—acts upon—what I tell him’. True hearing is doing.

³ I Corinthians 1:17; 2:1, 4.

The Covenant That Can Bind and Which Often Divides

Without going into the complexities of 'natural law', 'natural theology' and the images or icons that are common to mankind,⁴ it can surely be seen that if there is one covenant common to all mankind then that is a vastly important factor in the human scene. It means that the creational unity of the human race is prior to the differences which later ensued, and the variety of cultures, religions, and so on.

In other words, if there is such a Covenant of Creation, then we ought to enquire about it and seek to make much of it. It would help us to view these differences in a new light. It would not necessarily abolish them, but it would help us to see one another in that new light of which we speak. In other words, it would mean that human beings are human beings and have covenant in common long before they are Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and animists. They are of one common stock⁵ before they are Chinese, Japanese, French, German and British. Behind their cultural laws and taboos they have a common morality which springs from Creation and not from second thoughts about everything. We know we will never unravel the complexities of race, culture and religion but

there can be much coming together—if we will—on the basis of our common created humanity.

The Wonder of the Universal Covenant

I am suggesting in this important Preface that we need to open our eyes, refresh our thinking and alert ourselves to the fact of this Covenant of Creation. We may have had a foreshortened perspective of history and so of God, Man and Creation. We may have missed much that pertains to hope—the kind of hope which would make much sense of past history and of the history that is moving towards a universal climax. If so, it is possible that our study of God's Covenant of Creation may not only supply hitherto missing pieces of a puzzle, but understanding that Covenant may show us history is, in fact, not a puzzle to be solved. The humble in spirit are not baffled by the mystery of God. They live in that mystery and know what is what.

It is not an exaggeration, then, to speak of the wonder of covenant. Let us, with expectancy and delight, seek to explore that wonder.

⁴ Here I mean that throughout humanity all peoples have images of God, of Man, of Creation, of Law and of humanity. These images may differ from people to people, culture to culture and even within these groupings but such images are universal and people live by them. None is without them.

⁵ cf. Paul's statement in Acts 17:26, 'And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation ...'

Section 1

Chapters 1–9

INTRODUCTION TO GOD'S COVENANT

In this introductory section, we are going to read and think about God's Covenant with Man and the whole Creation. For some people, if not many, this might be a new way of thinking in regard not only to the Bible but to life generally.

I am sure we will discover that many keys to understanding God, the universe and ourselves will come out of a close look at the biblical idea of covenant. In fact the delights that lie within this great theme are innumerable. How often folk who discover this scriptural truth exclaim, 'When you think about it, there is really nothing more than covenant. It covers everything'.

Maybe this is a wide generalisation but it has much truth in it. We will be looking at one of the prime facts, namely that God's covenants are not contractual. By this we mean that God is always the Giver and does not give His gifts conditionally. He does not say, 'You do this, and I will do that', or 'I have

done this so you must do that'. It is difficult for us to see God as non-contractual in His dealings because almost everything we do is on a contractual basis.

We will be looking at the freedom of the human spirit when it lives according to the way God has shaped us—in His image. Three elements of this image have to do with Vocation, living in God's Sabbath Rest and in the fullness of human Marriage.

May you, the reader, enjoy our introduction to this vital theme of Scripture.

CHAPTER 1

THE WONDER OF COVENANT

Introduction

Why is covenant a wonder? A biblical study of covenant can often be seen as technical, and dull, even to the point of being boring. It is a word we use more in law-language today than in general conversation and thought. So we need to shine it up a bit to make it attractive. Yet there would be no point in trying to make it attractive if it were not of genuine significance. For example, if we do not daily live in covenant then what is the point of selecting it for a study? The fact of life is that we live in many covenants, not only in legal ones, but also in interpersonal ones. We have agreements, spoken or unspoken, concerning relationship. If, as some theologians claim,¹ a covenant is a bond, or it involves 'bonding', then the idea of covenant comes to life. Today we talk of 'bonding' as an intimate relational thing—the bonding of a mother to her baby, and a father sharing in that bonding. In this sense it is relevant. We even talk of a bonding with pets, such as taking a baby budgerigar and acting as a person who cares for and feeds it. We also have the more general bonding of agreements, from conditional ones to contractual. In some cases such covenants are without relational elements.

Marriage in the Bible is sometimes called a covenant and is, of course, intimately relational. We can think of

¹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1980, p. 4.

nothing more bonding than man and woman becoming 'one-flesh'. In the Bible we have covenants between Abraham and Abimelech, Isaac and Abimelech, Laban and Jacob, Jonathan and David. Indeed there are many covenants, sometimes in the forms of varying treaties, even treaties with the land, with things and even with death. The covenant of David and Jonathan has that quality of two souls being knit together—a beautiful bonding indeed. Whether described or not as bonding, friendship is a covenant of the richest order.² If we recognised some of our own 'treaties' that we also make in life, then we might not think of covenants so much as biblical matters with religious connotations, but as warm, living and relational matters. On the other hand, the bonding—so called—may be of a merely formal and legal nature, a bonding of convenience shaped to the advantage of both parties, carrying no intimacy whatever.

So much, then, for a simple look at the idea of covenant in Scripture.

The Meaning of Covenant in the Scriptures

The fact of covenant is so evident in the Scriptures that we can say that biblically speaking it is a named reality with which we have to contend and without which the Scriptures would make little sense. O. Palmer Robertson³ defines a covenant as '*a bond in blood sovereignly administered*'. When God enters into a covenant relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a

life-and-death bond. A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered'. Generally speaking this definition holds well, but when we ask whether this was always the case we face some problems. Whilst, in some cases, covenants do involve bonding, yet the origin of the primary covenant—the one we call 'the Covenant of Creation'—issues from the creational relationship of God and Man, rather than from some ritual or agreement which is intended to make them one. We need, at the same time, to have a reliable understanding of covenant. M. Weinfield, in his article on *berith*, seems to provide that reliable understanding, technical as it may seem. He has the following valuable note:

The most plausible solution seems to be the one that associates *berith* with Akk. *biritu*, "clasp," "fetter" (cf. the Talmudic *byryt*). This is supported by the Akkadian and Hittite terms for treaty: Akk. *riksu*, Hitt. *ishíul*, both meaning "bond". The concept of a *binding* settlement also stand behind Arab. 'aqd, Lat. *vinculum fidei*, "bond of faith," *contractus*, "contract," and is likewise reflected in German *Bund*. This etymology might support the reading *ma'asoreth habberith* in Ezek. 20:37 ("I will make you enter into the bond of the covenant"), suggested long ago. The Greek terms for covenant, *synthéke*, *harmonía* (*Iliad* xxii.255), *synthesía* (ii.339), and *synemosyne* (xxii.261), also express the idea of binding/putting together. The "bond" metaphor explains the use of "strengthening" or "fastening" to convey the idea of the "validity" or "reliability" of the treaty. Thus we find in Akk. *dunnunu riksate*, "to fasten the bonds" (= to validate the treaty), or *riksu dannu*, "strong persistent bond" (=a valid and reliable treaty), and similarly in Aram. *lethaqqaphah 'esar*, "strengthen the bond" (Dnl. 6:8). The Greek term for annulling the pact is *lyein*, "to loosen", which also points to the understanding of the

² In Psalm 55:20 it is recorded, 'My companion stretched out his hand against his friends'. He violated his covenant.

³ Robertson, op. cit., pp. 4ff.

treaty as a bond.⁴

If we commence with the Hebrew word used for covenant, namely *berith*, we are faced with a number of opinions as to its derivation. Even so, the nature of the covenant is fairly apparent in the Scriptures. There are also descriptions of covenant (*berith*) which are contemporary with the patriarchs and the times of Israel, so that some theologians see Israel as deriving its ideas of covenant from those systems. Yet others note elements which are significantly different and unique to Israel. It can be debated as to whether the idea of covenant is basic to what may be called natural law,⁵ that is, that the idea of covenant is innate in all humanity but takes its various forms according to its cultures. The study of contemporary forms of covenant may be quite helpful but those may not necessarily have been influential in forming what we now call, loosely, 'biblical covenants'.

For our part we will look primarily at the matter of covenant as we find it in Scripture. What immediately strikes us is that no covenant is explicitly mentioned until Genesis chapters 6 and 9 where a Covenant with Noah is made which affects the whole of Creation. Later we see Covenants made with Abraham, Moses, David and then the New Covenant in the New Testament of which

⁴ M. Weinfield, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1975, p. 4.

⁵ It may be that because God had relationship with Man, and human beings with one another, the idea of 'covenant' is innate to our humanity. The fact that it is so universal, and takes various forms, does not necessarily mean that any culture borrows from another. Whilst Israel may have imported—or been influenced by—certain forms of other cultures, this does not mean that the basic idea of covenant was not already innate to it as the people of God.

Christ is called 'the Mediator'. In amongst these Covenants are many others of lesser nature, one of which could be called 'Levitical', another 'a covenant of peace'—and so on. The idea of 'the everlasting Covenant' is one which constantly presents itself and, to say the least, is intriguing. What does it mean? How could all the covenants mentioned above be everlasting?

We can conclude that covenant is by no means uninteresting, outdated or outmoded, and so irrelevant to us and non-significant. It is highly significant. We have used the term 'the wonder of covenant', and a unique wonder it is as we shall shortly see. We may discover that without realising it, we have, in fact, always lived under covenant. Coming to realise it may cause life to take on a different hue altogether.

The Way God Approaches Covenant

There is a number of terms in the Old Testament which gives us certain views of the covenants God makes. Various translations use equivalent terms such as 'league', 'treaty', 'compact', 'solemn compact', 'agreement'. In one case—Isaiah 42:6—the expression 'covenant' is virtually a synonym of light. The bonding, then, is no light thing. The mode of covenant is also defined. *Karat berith* is 'to cut a covenant'. *Heqim berith* is 'to establish a covenant'. *Natan berith* is 'to grant a covenant'. *Sim berith* is 'to set down'. And *siwwa berith* is 'to command a covenant'. In their contexts the use of the various verbs is understandable.

Linked with covenant are ideas of God having commanded His Law, His Statutes and the mention of His judgements which relate to Israel's transgressing, breaking, sinning against and rejecting His Covenant.

The bond between God and Israel is not to be taken lightly, for breaking the Covenant brings cursings, just as keeping it brings blessings. In one sense, as we shall further see, the Covenant of God and the Law of God are virtually one. They are synonymous.

All God's Covenants Are Unilateral

Whilst we have spoken of human covenants which have elements of the contractual, this cannot be said of God's covenants. They are by His initiative and must be seen as such. When God commands a covenant, then He also places a covenantal obligation to obedience in response to His goodness, for such covenants are for blessing. The obligation is simply for the continued obtaining of blessing and as a way of avoiding cursing. What we must avoid thinking is that God makes parity agreements. Certainly the elements of covenants which appear to begin with Noah and continue into the New Covenant are elements of covenants that are somehow or another linked with grace.

CHAPTER 2

GOD'S COVENANT COMMENCES

The Commencement of Covenant

Where do we sight the first covenant in the Scriptures? Some Reformed theology refers to a Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the Son before time, so that covenant precedes Creation. Some Reformed theologians speak of a Covenant of Works between God and Adam at Creation. The question can be raised as to whether the Father and the Son are not one in their relationship and so in their intention in the unity of the Triune Godhead, a unity which also includes the Person and action of the Holy Spirit. Can we really speak of the Father making a covenant with His Son? Again, in regard to a Covenant of Works with Adam, is there any explicit, biblical presentation of such? Was Creation the subject of blessing of Adam only if he obeyed an agreement, and of cursing if he did not? One can sympathise with the ideas of the pre-Creation Covenant of the Father and the Son, and see some merit in the so called Covenant of Works, but we may miss the deepest of all understandings if we invest these two covenants with a contractual element.

In fact no covenant is explicitly mentioned in

relation to the Creation¹ and we would be hardpressed to agree that the first covenant which appears explicitly in Genesis is that between God and Noah, or, we may have to say, between God and Creation. Generally then, the exposition of covenants has proceeded along the lines of the first covenant being the Noahic one, and the next with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and with Israel—including the Davidic Covenant. The final covenant is the New Covenant made in the blood of Christ, the covenant of which He is the Mediator. Even so, this traditional view has been challenged. It has been claimed by some commentators² that the use of *heqim berith* in Genesis 6:17–18 and 9:8f.—‘to establish a covenant’³—is not the same as *karat berith* which is ‘to cut a covenant’. The writers quoted in our footnote, William Dumbrell and Gordon Wenham—amongst others—point out that God did not ‘cut a covenant’ with Noah but simply ‘established’ or ‘affirmed’ the Covenant already in place. This would have to be the Covenant of Creation.

¹ We can certainly take the following Scriptures as referring to a Covenant of Creation: Isaiah 24:4ff.; Jeremiah 33:19–26. But it is the point of God *establishing*, that is, *confirming* His Covenant, as said in Genesis 6:18 and 9:9–17, which refers us to the fact and order of that Covenant. It is not only a covenant with Man but with ‘every living creature of all flesh’ that shows its universal nature.

² See William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, Paternoster Press, Exeter, UK, 1984, pp. 11ff., 25–26, and Gordon Wenham in *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1987, pp. 174–175. O. Palmer Robertson, op. cit., takes the Covenant of Creation for granted. On page 67f. he outlines the elements of that Covenant.

³ Reference may be made to Exodus 6:1–9 where God was speaking not of ‘cutting a covenant’ with Abraham, although He did do this, but of ‘establishing’ the Covenant with the patriarchs, and it is in the light of this established Covenant that He now proposes to liberate Israel from Egypt.

It could be argued linguistically that *heqim berith* and *karat berith*, whilst technically different, may yet be equivalents. God is simply making a covenant with Noah and does not have to cut it. His word is as good as any ritual. If, however, ‘establishing the covenant’ contains a truth of great significance then the argument may not stand on linguistic grounds when the strongest use of the linguistic is *for* the Covenant of Creation. This would appear to be the case theologically also, as we shall seek to prove.

The Covenant of Creation Is Not Directly Nominated as Covenant

When we ask why a Covenant of Creation is not explicitly stated the answer could be that there was no call for that. If it is fair to say that the establishment of the Covenant with Noah and the new form of it is one of *grace* and that thereafter covenants are those of grace, then it must be said that the Covenant of Creation was *not* one of *works* but one of *gift*.

Some Reformers had to see a Covenant of Works in Creation. Other theologians, realising the covenantal grace revealed in the agreement with Noah and the Creation (Genesis 9:8–17), had to read back later, redemptive grace into the work of Creation.⁴ It should be noted that God simply planned Creation. Whilst His planning certainly had grace in view, for example Ephesians 1:3–14, yet grace always has the idea of restoration from some fallen position of a person or nation. *Chen* as favour, and *chesed* as lovingkindness as in restorative and supportive, really add up to *charis* in

⁴ They saw also that all following covenants were of grace.

the New Testament. Exodus 34:6–7 shows the nature of God as grace, and some commentators link the Exodus statement with John 1:14, 'full of grace and truth'.

Creation Comes Giftwise to All That Is Created

The idea that Creation is the action of God in creating Man does not have the flavour of grace. There is not 'God-initiated, unsolicited, unmerited favour' here, but sheer gift. Statements such as in Psalms 8 and 104 and Paul's 'For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving', and 'God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy', tell us that Creation is not 'a handout'. No wonder the Creation spells out the nature of God and no wonder Man should be filled with thanksgiving.⁵ It is gratitude for being created, and not for some Divine welfare arrangement! It is also believing that God has given everything required for Man's well-being—elements which we shall shortly consider.

If this is seen—and fallen Man finds it hard to believe God is so good—then to speak of a Covenant of Creation is to see it as primarily non-contractual. Nor, in one sense, does it require grace to live in it. We are not ruling out the element of obligation, but the word 'obligation' should not be considered in the light which

⁵ It could be argued from Romans 1:21 that pre-Fall Man was to be thankful to God, and surely this was the case. Gratitude for the gift of Creation does not imply that Creation was of grace, but that it was of love, and love responds to love in gratitude. Something of our fallenness is always present in us, militating against a pure acceptance of love's gift.

sinful persons may view it.

The Key to Primary Covenant Is Creational Relationships

Weinfield's 'most plausible solution' to the meaning of *berith* is 'binding' and 'the bond of faith'. If we accept this as an authentic meaning of the word, then to speak of covenant as involving relationships—as William Dumbrell does—is to lead us to *the* relationships which are not just legal and contractual but creational, the essential key to the Covenant of Creation. *The Covenant of Creation is the natural relationship of God with His entire Creation, and in particular with Man.* Within this statement are dimensions which, with difficulty, we may even begin to compass.

I would like to make the point clearly that the terms 'bond' and 'bonding' may be misleading.

First we must come back to the Genesis account of Creation with the light that the whole of 'the Law and the Prophets' and the New Testament shed on the nature of God. Genesis 1:26 states:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

This statement must be seen as the most intimate of all relationships that God can have with and from the innate unity of the three Persons in Trinity. This bonding must be seen in the light of full intimacy and communion. When we grasp something of this 'bond-

ing' of the three Persons—if we be permitted that word—then we understand something of Christ's high-priestly prayer in John 17:20–26. There He speaks of Himself being in the Father, and the Father in Him, as one. He desires the children that God has given Him to be in the Father and the Son, and the Father and the Son to be in them.

Certainly one of the keynotes of God's Covenants with Abraham and Israel is, 'I will be their God and they shall be my people and I will dwell in their midst'.⁶ Only on this basis, and never apart from it, can we understand any covenant, and in this case, creational Covenant. What we hope to see is that the creational Covenant is the universal Covenant that covers all Creation, including the entire human race. This creational Covenant finds its teleological fulfilment in the new heaven and the new earth, in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, and the voice from the throne, as John's Revelation (21:3–4) records:

Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

Nothing more intimate or more bonding in communion can go beyond this climax—this *telos*.

⁶ cf. Jeremiah 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32:38; Ezekiel 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23; Zechariah 8:8.

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S COVENANT OF CREATION

Knowledge of God: God's Words to the Primal Pair

Neither the word *berith*, nor any dynamic equivalent term, appears in the Creation account.¹ The relationship of Man to God must be seen from the fact of his being created in the image of God. Paul later calls the man 'the image and glory of God' (1 Corinthians 11:7) and

¹ There is what might be called an oblique reference in Jeremiah 33:20–22, 'Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me'. Again in Jeremiah 33:25–26, 'Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his descendants to rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them'. J. A. Thompson comments, 'The regular succession of day and night was established at creation (Genesis 1:5; 8:22). It was part of the nature of things. It is here described as Yahweh's covenant (*berith*) with day and night which could never be broken'. *The Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980, p. 603.

the woman 'the glory of man'. Together they constitute the full image of God—'Male and female He created them' and called them Man. Created Man knew and can know God, simply by his communion with Him. God and Man have a relationship which involves first the words of God and then Man's response to those words. His being in the image of God determines his deep relationship with God—Man knowing God as Man has need to know.

This image of God which Man is, has been variously described through the ages. We cannot here enter into all these explanations. However, one explanation must be that Man reflects the glory of God.² Another must be that he, Man, acts with God in His dealings with Creation and its history. William Dumbrell emphasises the visibility of Man, 'By creation, man is then the visible representative in the created world of the invisible God'.³ This is a good description, which Dumbrell then proceeds to link with God's Kingship in the light of the creational Mandate given in Genesis 1:28 (cf. Psalm 8:3–8) for Man to have dominion over the earth. Because God is King—as the Scriptures well bear out—Man as His image is regal, displaying that Kingship in his rule of the world.

Whilst all that is true enough, yet it is not all of the image—the *imago Dei*. Man, as the reflection of all that

² Later we will see that Christ is 'the visible expression of the invisible God'. But He is not simply the reflection of God. Rather is He 'the radiance of God's glory', contrary to the way some translations of Hebrews 1:3 have been rendered. Man *reflects* that radiance but is *not* that radiance, otherwise he would have deity. Christ, 'the man from heaven', is 'a life-giving spirit'. Man as created was of the earth, earthly, but sufflated by the breath of God and given personal being (*nephesh*). He received life but could not give it.

³ Dumbrell, op. cit., p. 34.

is God, is made in the image of the Triune Godhead. Therefore, incorporated within Man's dominion must be the matters of Vocation, of sharing the Sabbath Rest of the Creator (in Genesis 2:1–3), of Marriage and of fruitfulness as components of the creational Mandate. These are the practical components which constitute the life and action of the creational Covenant so far as Man is concerned. If we take the principle included in our first footnote concerning the way in which God has covenanted with 'the regular succession of day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth', which were established at Creation as described in Genesis 1:5 and 8:22, then in J. A. Thompson's words, 'It was part of the nature of things. It is here described as Yahweh's covenant (*berith*) with day and night which could never be broken'.⁴

What we are maintaining here is that Vocation (Mandate), living in God's Sabbath Rest and Marriage are the ways in which Man participates in the Covenant of Creation. In thinking this way we must dismiss ideas of a 'Covenant of Works' and even the idea of a time of probation for Man. We must never let go of the understanding that Creation set Man universally in a covenant which is everlasting, and which continually embraces the entirety of the human race.

The Everlasting, Universal Covenant

It is not our intention here to deal with the dozen or so uses of the term 'the everlasting covenant' in the Old Testament along with the mention of 'the eternal covenant' in Hebrews 13:20. We need to say, however,

⁴ Thompson, op. cit., cf. Jeremiah 33:20, 25.

that in whatever contexts it is used it ultimately transcends even the bounds of what we may call Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenantal concepts and promises. This 'everlasting covenant' does include those Covenants and more fully expresses itself in the New Covenant, but being from of old, the Covenant of Creation is fulfilled in the *eschaton* and *telos*. In short, it is the Covenant that covers all Creation from its inception to its goal and includes all humanity within itself. This is by no means to claim that all humanity responds to the regimen of that Covenant. But it does say that human beings' final destiny—whether of redemption or of judgement—is determined by their response to, or rejection of the work of the Creator-God. In the pursuit of His covenantal purposes, God established afresh the Covenant of Creation following the flood, which led to the Covenants of Grace with Abraham, with Israel and the New Covenant.

The Elements of the Covenant Which Determine the Life and Action of Created Man

We have spoken above of two factors:

- (i) Man innately knows God because he is made in His image and as the image he has conversation with God—God informing, directing and aiding Man to do His will; and
- (ii) Man proceeds within the Covenant in the three elements—Vocation, living in God's Sabbath Rest and Marriage.

These latter three also happen to be the elements which the serpent sets out to attack and defame by tempting

Man to autonomy of being, something which is incomprehensible within the context of Covenant and incongruous with it. It is here, as we have said, that the words of God have great significance. Those words uttered by God are the only principles by which Man lives as created: the spelling out of the Mandate of Vocation; the invitation to enjoy all things of the garden; the Man to keep that garden and—by inference—the man and the woman to work together within their communion with God and their mutual communion as the 'one-flesh' entity.

The Obligation of Man in the Covenant of Creation

We have asserted that Man was created in the action and gift of God, and that there was no Covenant of Works. Since God made a covenant with the day and night and the heavens and the earth to work at their appointed times (Jeremiah 33:20; cf. Genesis 1:14–18), it follows that Man was to be what God created him to be and to do. We use the term 'obligation' rather than point to a works contract, or minimise a whole array of glorious gifts of life, of superb Vocation, of mutual male-female unity and of the enjoyment of Edenic pleasure. This latter gift has the whole earth in view as the scene of humanity's familial life and ultimate destiny. To use the word 'obligation' here is to take away any sense of a heavy legal imposition to be, as it were, the slave-servant of God.

God's Will as Man's Life

Finally, in this section, we need to see that the way in which Man was to live as a race—as God's created people—was to live by the Divine Law. This Law of social and vocational being was the life of the Triune God, the way of love of the three Persons.⁵ The Law of God is simply the way of life and purpose which is exercised within the Godhead, and outwardly towards the Creation. This is the Law of love, which is not something with a being of its own (*hypostasis*)—under which the three Persons live—but is the very Law of their being by which they subsist. The Father Who is called *fons divinitatis*—‘the Fountain of Godhead’—is love; the Son is ‘the Son of His love’ being eternally generated by and from the Father; and the Spirit is ‘the Spirit of love’, ever proceeding from the Father and the Son and being the Spirit of them both.

This Law of love is what enables Man as a community to know what to be and how to live. It devolves into Man loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and his neighbour as himself. All that was to come following Man's Fall in Eden, his ejection from the Garden and his life from then on to God's ultimate *telos* (goal) for him, could be called ‘the Law and the Prophets’. And those two—as one—were to constitute a transcript of the Divine Law. As one writer has put it, ‘Man is the personal, living image of God and

the law is the written preceptual image of God’.⁶

If Man had, out of responsive love and gratitude to God for being created and having been given rich life, responded to the Law which was written preceptually in his heart by reason of Creation—then he would have followed the Divine transcript and most naturally have lived within the Covenant of Creation. As it was, the serpent was determined to destroy the same Covenant, demean Man and denigrate the loving Creator. What the serpent could not—or would not—understand, was that He Who is Creator is also Redeemer and determined Glorifier of His people. He could not understand that Man could, should and would ‘trust his soul to a faithful Creator’.

God's Covenant of Creation was and is the assurance that all things foreshadowed in the original Creation will have their ultimate fulfilment in the new heaven and the new earth, the goal and outcome of that initial and universal Covenant.

⁵ For a fuller treatment of this see my book *Sweeter than Honey, More Precious than Gold*, NCPI, Coromandel East, SA, 1995, which is an exposition of the delightfulness and substantial relational nature of the Law of God.

⁶ J. A. Motyer, ‘Biblical concept of law’, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984, pp. 623–624.

CHAPTER 4

THE BREACH OF GOD'S COVENANT

**God Does Not 'Cut' the
*Covenant of Creation***

We have seen that God neither 'establishes' nor 'cuts' the Covenant of Creation. All that comes from His hand is 'good' and, at the last, 'very good'. Every work of His hand is pure and is beautiful in its pristine state. The Covenant is not spoken except in the heart of the great Creator. Every tree of the garden in which Man had been placed was usefully fruitful, pleasurable to sight and taste and for the good of the human creature. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not for Man to eat lest he die. Such 'knowledge of good and evil' would prove to be lethal no matter what other word—such as the word of the serpent—contradicted the word of the Covenant God.

Man had enough to do with his labour in tending and keeping the garden, in contemplating the Mandate for ruling the earth, and in giving names to the beasts of the field and jungle. There was also the tree of life, should he wish to eat of it. The natural elements of creational Covenant were his way of life and 'the one-flesh union', the joy-capping wonder of God's eternal agreement. The 'cutting' of a covenant was unnecessary. Grace, in this sense, was not called for. Sealed promises were not required for peace and assurance in the heart. The word of God was enough for all.

Breaching the Covenant

Man, as the man-woman 'one-flesh' unity, could not have had more blessedness and bliss than in being created by God and having fellowship with Him. In Man's innocence, he enjoyed the delights of Eden, and there were no threats made to hold the primal couple in this joy and serenity. All of it would have been hope-lessly idyllic without responsibility—responsibility for the whole Creation, or, as it has been put, 'covenant relationship'. Unspoken, but not unfelt, Covenant brought with it its own natural obligation. But then the Divine transcript of the Law of social being and living was implanted in the heart of Man by the God in whose image he had been made. Moral rectitude presupposed moral choice.

Later in Israel, the people, at the blood ceremony which bound them to God in covenant, promised to keep the commanded Covenant. They were to 'do it', and 'remember it', and to 'walk in it'. They were warned against breaching it, and told of the blessings which would obtain when they lived in it, and the curses which would come when they breached it—which they so often did.¹ The closest we have to such a warning in the Creation account is in Genesis 2:17, the warning that death would follow any eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The serpent, we are told, was 'subtle' or 'crafty'. Innumerable descriptions and explanations have been given of his part in drawing the primal couple on to breach the Covenant. The essence of the temptation was to separate Man from God, to convince him that

¹ These blessings and cursings are spoken of vividly in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28.

humanity could be autonomous, that humanity could have a knowledge of good and evil which would virtually make it 'God' or 'as God'. The suggestion is present that God has withheld from Man that which is rightfully his, the power to go beyond being Man-as-a-creature to becoming Man-as-God. Man must have his eyes open and see what, in innocence, he never has seen. Certainly something of this order happened when the woman was beguiled and seduced and when the man knowingly sought such Godhead, conscious that he was breaching the trust of the Covenant.

Whilst they achieved something of what the serpent promised—knowing good and evil—they did not achieve it as promised. Knowing good and evil apart from God is a terrifying matter, as they soon discovered. Paul later said, 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned'. He thus showed that the entire human race was affected by what has been called 'original sin'. The dreadful terror of fear of death and the reign of sin cannot be computed, so awful it was and is. Far from achieving life apart from—and in the face of—the eternal Covenant of Creation, Man was plunged into death. 'You shall surely die' certainly met its fulfilment that day. Man died relationally to God.² He lost the communion that had made him glow as the *imago Dei*.

Ahead, we will see that not only was God not 'surprised' by this event, but that He had determined before time that the coming of grace into the Covenant

² For the change the other way see II Corinthians 5:14–15, when Man, through redemption, comes alive to God relationally, in communion and in holiness and in the fullness of covenant. The New Covenant which is the Covenant of Creation comes into its own.

of Creation would defeat the serpent and bring His elect into renewal of the Covenant of Creation. Yet that great work should not detract from us seeing the horror and evil of Man's rebellion against God and his asserting himself to be as God, knowing good and evil. In determining for himself what these two things are, and in separating his conscience from God, he thus refused the communion which made him one with God and the three great components of the Covenant of Creation—Vocation, the Sabbath Rest of God, and Marriage.

All Was Not Lost Irrevocably

To protect the primal couple from a permanent state of such existence, God drove them from Eden, protecting them against eating of the tree of life.³ It is clear from Hebrews 11:4ff. and I John 3:10ff. that the human race was not left to die on its own. These two passages show us that from the beginning, especially from the time of Abel, there have been men and women who have been called 'people of faith' and 'children of God'. The grace of God began immediately to liberate many from the deceit of the serpent,⁴ and so there were on the

³ I am interested in the suggestion that the couple had probably eaten of this tree prior to the Fall. To me there seems to be some weakness in such a claim. Surely they would have lived for ever, even in the face of the temptation and the Fall.

⁴ In the New Testament especially, the 'ancient serpent, the devil who goes out to deceive the whole world' comes in for adverse treatment. According to Hebrews 2:14–15 and Colossians 2:14–15 he holds people in thrall through fear of death, but that fear of death has been defeated in every way by 'perfect love' (I John 4:18). This is primarily the love of God shown in forgiveness, a forgiveness based in old times on acceptable, bloody sacrifice, ultimately and totally in Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

one hand 'the sons of Cain' and on the other, 'the sons of God'.

God had told the woman that from her would come a 'seed', a male child⁵ who would crush the head of the serpent. Thus the woman who had eaten the fruit was called into battle with the serpent.

Some Affects and Effects of the Breach of Covenant

The three elements of the creational Covenant were not negated but the fulfilling of them was deeply affected. As Genesis 4–6 show us, the original sin led to such attitudes and acts of violence and corruption that 'The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually'. Even after the flood 'the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth'. Thus the carrying out of the vocational Mandate was—and is—certainly greatly impeded. Clearly, the relational differences that came into the marriages of the primal and succeeding couples changed much of the pure love and fellowship of that one-flesh union. And as for God's Sabbath Rest, the wicked became 'like the restless sea' casting up 'mire and dirt' and there was — and is—no rest for the wicked (Isaiah 57:20–21).

We may say these things and we may see the terrible state of Man under God's wrath for 'suppressing the truth in unrighteousness', as well as perceive that 'in Adam all die'.⁶ Yet we must nevertheless assert that nothing has changed in the Covenant of Creation.

The Immutable Covenant of Creation

We are sometimes tempted to think of 'the Covenants of Grace' such as the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants, and see unbelieving humanity as outside those Covenants and thus utterly bereft of covenant.⁷ Yet none is outside the Covenant of Creation, by nature of the case. It is this Covenant which defines whether we are covenant-observers or covenant-breakers. This Covenant of Creation is the basis for final blessing or final judgement. It means that God is concerned for all nations and for all persons. If we can understand this principle then it will help us to have a full theology, cosmology and (biblical) anthropology.

⁶ cf. Romans 1:18ff. and I Corinthians 15:22.

⁷ This would appear so when we read Romans 9:4; Ephesians 2:11–14 and similar passages, yet other passages condition our thinking, such as John 3:16; I John 2:2; 4:14. Whilst these certainly do not point to universal salvation they do point to the love of God for all humanity (cf. Matthew 5:43–48), even if some members of the race prove to be finally impenitent and so finally unredeemed.

⁵ The pronoun relating to this seed is 'he', and in Revelation 12:5 it is written, 'she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron'. It is interesting that the literal translation here should be 'a male son' (*huion arsen*).

CHAPTER 5

THE GRACE OF THE COVENANTS

Man in Sin and Grace

We have noted that from the time of the Fall, much of the grace of God has appeared since many born of Adam have appeared as 'people of faith' and 'children of God'. The two, of course, are synonymous. The poison of the serpent has not destroyed the human race but made that race an applicant for redeeming grace. Genesis 3:14–15—often called 'the proto-evangel'—was highly significant in that it did not leave the primal couple, and hence all humanity, in the doldrums of death. God's words to the serpent were:

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all cattle,
and above all wild animals;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel".

For some theologians this was the beginning of the Covenant of Redemption, or at least its emergence in time, given that it was planned prior to Creation. However, a better way of looking at it may be that God,

at this point, was acting on the basis of Creation, that is being 'a faithful Creator'. Just as His wrath is being revealed from heaven upon all human creatures who suppress the truth that is functional in Creation, so His wrath is upon the serpent—the figure of the devil.¹ And as Creator and not even as Redeemer He is determined to preserve Man and Creation.² Without doubt grace, because of the Fall, has entered into the matter of the Covenant of Creation. But grace has emerged *from* that Covenant, rather than having turned it *to* a Covenant of Grace. It is this grace that has devised and demanded other covenants such as the Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants. As we shall see, all covenants are ultimately related to the Covenant of Creation, and have the reparation and *telos* of that Covenant in mind. It is interesting to see that whilst the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants have redemption as part of their being, what is in view is not primarily redemption but the restoration of the members of those Covenants to creational fullness.

If we miss the fact that the Covenant of Creation is operative from Creation to the New Creation, and in the New Creation is simply the Covenant of God come to fulfilment, then we have missed the significance both of Creation and of covenant. So then, the immediate onslaught upon the serpent is one with the fact of redemption which faces Man. And as we have observed, it calls for the woman to be pitted against the serpent. And of course, no less is man pitted against the

¹ cf. Revelation 12:1–12.

² Of course the two go together. What we are emphasising is that since there is a Covenant of Creation, preserving that Creation would be part of it. We see God's redemptive activity as innate to Creation—*inherent* in it. But the action of redemption is primarily of grace and in that sense God is wholly the subject of redemption. He is not 'bound' to redeem!

same serpent. The seed of the woman will be a man. Whilst the woman brings forth the seed, that cannot be without the man, in fact the seed comes from the corporate human race, whatever the origin of the seed of the serpent may be supposed to be.³

Grace Obtaining from Adam to Noah

At this point we repeat the fact that the death which came to Man via the Fall did not leave all human beings wholly dead because grace was working faith in some of the children of Adam, namely those in whom grace evoked the response of faith. So by faith Abel offered up a better sacrifice than Cain and he, being dead, yet lives. Whilst Paul could speak of the human race as dead in sin⁴ and under the power of the serpent—called by Paul ‘the prince of the power of the air’—yet Creation, through the God of Creation, proved and proves stronger than the Adamic death. Whilst some theology—that which presupposes a Covenant of Redemption planned before Creation—traces the history of a Covenant of Redemption from Genesis 3:14–15, it is better to see that Creation was with a view to redemption. Redemption is not layered on Creation, nor is Creation merely its ‘backdrop’, but the reality is that Creation is all about redemption since it is the one God

Who is Creator and Redeemer.

If this is true then the whole of Creation is involved, and the whole of humanity—as part of that Creation—is also involved. Whilst the Covenant with Abraham is certainly concentrated upon him and his seed, yet Genesis 12:1–3 shows us that it is linked with the destinies of the nations. Indeed it is oriented towards all the peoples of the world. As for the Creation, Paul shows us in Romans 8:18–25 that its liberation from the present futility to which it is subjected will occur when redeemed humanity is unveiled in its glory, and that Creation will share in ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’. On this reasoning Creation, and the humanity with which it is joined as part of that Creation, is always significant in its being. It is always confronted with, and by, the reality of the Creator, to say nothing of His Being as Redeemer, but it is not left to itself. The saying of the Greek poet, quoted by Paul, ‘In Him we live and move and have our being’, is perhaps as potent and theological an extra-biblical statement as the world has ever known.

Thus, without the explicit pronouncement of a particular Covenant of Redemption, grace has obtained with the human race since the Fall. Whilst chapters 4 and 6 of Genesis show the lethal working of sin and the spread of violence and corruption across the face of the earth, yet this does not represent a triumph of the serpent so much as it does God’s mercy in not destroying mankind in its corruption. Of course, everything was heading towards the flood, which can be seen no less as a judgement than anything else. Whilst it diminished sinful mankind to seven people living under grace, it also revealed the wrath of God upon evil. What concerns us is its outcome; the determination of God not to curse the earth because of Man’s sin, but to establish afresh its

³ In Revelation 12 and 13 the red dragon who is ‘that ancient serpent the Devil’ has a ‘seed’ in the beast, who is its clone—a ‘son-beast’ so to speak. Chapter 13 reveals a ‘foul trinity’ in the dragon, the first beast and the second beast (the ‘false prophet’ of II Thessalonians).

⁴ See Ephesians 2:1, 5; Romans 5:12ff.; cf. II Corinthians 5:15.

rhythm of life and seasons, and to persevere with Man himself, making him afresh to be the lord of that Creation. Nevertheless, 'the imagination of [his] heart remained evil from his youth'. Because of Man's evil the dread of God would be over all sentient creatures but the rudiments of the Covenant of Creation remained unaltered. In all this we see 'the faithful Creator'.

The Covenant with Noah

We have noted in accordance with good exegetes that the Covenant with Noah uses the term *berith*, but that no covenant is 'cut' because it is simply the establishment of the Covenant of Creation (which is not hitherto named explicitly). There is no question of any grace of moral salvation, but there is the question of Man and the creatures continuing in the Covenant of Creation. The passage of Genesis 9:8–17, quoted below, tells all the details. Doubtless we can speak of covenantal grace introduced to maintain the Creation in the face of human sinfulness. But we are not speaking explicitly of conflict with the serpent. Rather it is the grace which enables Man in his sinfulness to exist and be active, as also the Creation to pursue its way in spite of the fact that through the Fall it is still subjected to futility. Its subjection 'in hope' may well tell us how it persists down through the ages. We repeat, the Noahic Covenant is one of Creation with Man, with all living creatures and the earth:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the

earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth".

The Grace of Covenant Commences with the Confirming of the Covenant of Creation with Noah

We have concluded that God did not 'cut' a Covenant with Noah but confirmed the one already existing, the Covenant of Creation. Our heading above might lead us to think we would, here, deal with all covenants. That we cannot do until we see more of the nature of the Covenant of Creation. We will, of course, deal later with the Covenants called 'Abrahamic', 'Mosaic', 'Davidic' and 'New'. What we have established is that fallen Man cannot—were he ever so inclined—fulfil the Covenant of Creation.

CHAPTER 6

GOD'S COVENANT AND VOCATION

The Innate Demands of the Covenant of Creation

When we use the term 'demands' we have to take into consideration how certain words sound to fallen Man and what meanings and values he gives to them. This is an almost impossible task: at the best we can only suggest certain ideas in order to somehow counter such prejudices. The words 'authority', 'law', 'commands' and 'demands'—among many of their synonyms—sound unattractive, hard and even heavily legal where humans, even redeemed humans, are concerned. So the word 'demands' as a law-and-authority concept does not have the same value as, say, when two infatuated lovers 'demand' kisses from one another! Thus when we use this term 'demand' here it inevitably introduces a note which is contractual. 'Do this—or else', and that is not the spirit of the Covenant of Creation. Rather the idea is, 'This is the way life goes when Man—the one-flesh man and woman—was, and is, created'. Three basic elements of that Covenant of Creation emerge which are principles of living in Creation—*coram deo*—before God. They are:

- (i) the **Vocation** of fulfilling the Mandate;
- (ii) living in the **Sabbath Rest** of God; and
- (iii) the profound mystery of **Marriage**.

The Grace Required for the Covenant of Creation

We have claimed that Man being in the image of God, having the gift of created life, living in communion with the Triune Community of God and having implanted, by nature, the Law as a transcript of the life of the same Community, would by nature (that is naturally), live in accordance with the three components or principles set out above.¹ The Fall, however, has made a great difference to the spirit of Man and to the natural exercise of his will in conformity with that of God. Nothing but the grace of God can free him from the spirit-distorting effects of original sin and the guilts of the continuing acts of sins he commits.

If fallen persons refuse to become people of faith and likewise refuse to live as children of love, then the demands of the Covenant of Creation will seem onerous and unattractive. At this point we also have to say that sinners are those who 'suppress the truth in [acts of] unrighteousness' and upon them 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven'. They 'have a conscience [consciousness] of sins' which means they have the overlay of active guilt which, itself, acts as the wrath of God in the human conscience.² Thus there will be no desire to fulfil the principles of being creatures of God.

¹ We need to keep seeing that these three elements were not contractual. The living out of them may be said to be implicitly an obligation, but it is better to see them as ontological in Man by the very nature of Creation and so his true way of living. The matter of choice did not arise. Man's natural freedom would obtain in such living, and that freedom would carry its own incentive for such living.

² See Romans 1:18 for suppressing the truth, for being given up to their sin, sins and the accompanying guilt of the same; see also Hebrews 10:2, 22 for 'an evil conscience'.

We make the further point that there is an ontological pressure of 'oughtness'—perhaps the one Kant called 'the categorical imperative'—which is resident in all humans. By this we mean that the human conscience works in each as it is trained by that person and especially by the cultural mores in which he or she lives. Fallen human beings devise their own images of God, Man, Creation and Law and they live by these. The conscience works primarily by these elements, and such elements are devised in order to make life easiest for the person to carry it out. The system of ethics, for example, is generally aimed at the level of possible accomplishment. So we speak of 'natural law' and 'natural theology' and therefore of 'natural morality'. In all of this there is a morality which is more or less common to most tribes and cultures. Thus fallen human beings may roughly approximate in their endeavours to live according to the three creational principles of Vocation, Sabbath Rest and Marriage.

The catch in all this is that the pressure of the ontological—things as they really are—is always there. It is even beyond (above or below) the way in which the sinner seeks to live out life according to his images of God, Man, Creation and Law. His conscience is never fully at ease with its taught, acculturated mores. This is the unease which is set deeply within human beings, and which brings angst and the dread that accrues with guilt.

All of these elements show the need of grace in order to be a person of faith and a child of love, and then, in the face of the sinfulness of the human race, to pursue the demands of the Covenant of Creation, namely the will of God. Man, as a creature, always needed the power for holy action which came as a gift to him by way of the *imago Dei*, and his living in full communion with God. Fallen, Man needs grace to live

whenever the demands of ontology present themselves.

The First Principle of the Image of God and the Creational Mandate: Vocation

When we look at the creational Mandate set out in the passage of Genesis 1:26–31 we realise its many elements and the demands they would make even on a person living in innocence:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

Present as a primary factor is the blessing of God, 'God blessed them, and God said to them'. This blessing would have been the enablement for fulfilling the Mandate. Fruitfulness and multiplication would have

involved marriage, would have called for all contributions of labour, gifts, talents, abilities, trades and professions, and for the life of a loving community. Bringing the dynamic Creation under human lordship would have entailed the thoughtful, wise and firm natural dominion over all sentient creatures and what we call the vegetable and mineral worlds, to say nothing of the meteorological elements. The idea of filling the earth to completion has some sense of a future goal which is to be reached. A replete and complete world would mean a vocation with a future, and with what we might almost call a 'hope'.

When we further look upon the vastness of world life as we know it today we wonder at the high calling given to Man in the Mandate. Without Man's fallenness, the task would have been simpler—no deceit nor self-seeking, self-assertion, rivalry, chicanery, nepotism; no complications of homicide, genocide, immorality, ethnic and racial rivalries, and the like. In saying this we are talking almost as those who rave. Yet we must consider what it would have been to have had personal vocations within the general, communal Vocation of the human race. This is so, especially since the Law of God would have been extant, communion would have obtained and the desire to fulfil the best would have been the driving motivation.

Depravity and Deprivation

Not to fulfil the Vocation will always bring existential guilt, in the sense that persons will know themselves to have failed in the purpose for which they have been created. There will be the unavoidable fact, background and effects of original sin, as well as the objective guilts

of their own sins of commission and omission. No one would deny the joys that humans experience when they accomplish something, when they devise great works of culture and when they succeed in commerce, industry, social endeavours and family building. However much the depravity mars the perfection of the achievement, it is nevertheless satisfying to a great degree. Those of utopian and perfectionist bent dream of what could be, given ideological fulfilment. The whole human race is somehow involved in the vocational Mandate and much of its pleasure comes in the exercise of it.

Deprivation of the exercise of the full image of God is, however, a deterrent to genuine Rest and satisfaction in this life. By deprivation we mean the loss of that full communion which, by Creation, Man has with God, with one another and with the Creation in which the primal humanity lived. We live with so little of genuine love life and emotional fulfilment that there is much pain, shame, disfigurement, loss of self-esteem, and unrequited longing for friendship and intimacy. Life does not prove wholly satisfying. That yearning of the inner being for consummation of friendship with God and Man is an ontological reality, a constant emotional pressure which not even the vast resources of art in all its forms—literature, music, painting, sculpture—can fulfil. Our innumerable industries, which seek to compensate us for the substantial loss in this life of love, joy and peace, work hard to supply antidotes to misery and palliatives for suffering, though with little lasting effect.

Perhaps most miserable of all are those who cannot rise to any kind of vocation. On the one hand they may be the most angry amongst us, and on the other the most pathetic and listless, those who suffer from *accidie* and crass-mindedness. Whether we see these as states of judgement or not, we humanly need to have

compassion and sympathy for all. The antithesis of such a state is that of compulsive activism which allows the conscience no time for Rest: or is it the conscience, badly taught, which will not allow that Rest? Guilt has strange ways of working and the compulsive operator has no true Rest.

The vocational Mandate which should be Man's highest joy in the fulfilment of life can become humanity's most powerful source of misery.

A Note on Full Vocation

The Christian will recognise that to the creational Mandate is added the command of Christ for His followers to take the proclamation of redemption to all the world. Whilst this is a new mandate it is nevertheless to do with the creational Mandate for its aim is to restore human beings to fullness under the Covenant of Creation, something only grace can achieve. The Christian person—and community—will recognise that what we may call the redemptive act of God is effective within the New Covenant. But then that Covenant is within the Covenant of Creation with its purpose, as we have suggested above, the renewal of men and women in the universal Covenant.

CHAPTER 7

GOD'S COVENANT AND HIS SABBATH REST

The Sabbath Rest of God—an Important Part of Creation and Its Covenant

The primary passage referring to God's Rest is Genesis 2:1–3. We might note that it is not literally called 'God's Sabbath Rest':

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

Linked with this passage are Exodus 20:8–11; 23:12; 31:12–17 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15:

Exodus 20:8–11, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it".

Exodus 23:12, "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your ass may have rest, and the son of your bondmaid, and the alien, may be refreshed".

Exodus 31:12–17, And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; every one who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed'".

Deuteronomy 5:12–15, "Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your manservant, or your maidservant, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maid-servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day".

The context of the first passage is really that of

Genesis 1 but in particular 1:26–31 where Man is created and Creation is completed, Man being the zenith of the Creation. When all things are created God sees the Creation as 'very good'. Within this completeness Man is given his Mandate of Vocation, but the beginning of that Vocation—part of the creational Covenant demand—is linked with the Rest of God. God completes all in the six days and only when He has completed all, and because He has completed all, does He Rest, that is, does He desist from further acts of Creation. It is clear that, Creation having been completed, God expects Man to live in and use the Creation, and then on the seventh day to Rest from such labour.

The Second Principle of the Image: God and the Sabbath Rest

Certain elements emerge from these passages:

- (i) the completion of works in which God rejoices, and their completeness is sealed, so to speak, by the fact of the seventh day, the day of Rest;
- (ii) it is for God a day of Rest;
- (iii) God is spoken of as being refreshed by the Rest;
- (iv) God blessed the day, and whilst blessing is given to Man prior to, and related with, the Mandate, blessing is not generally spoken of as relating to things such as a day. This must mean the day is a source of blessing, and makes sense of God's being refreshed;
- (v) God makes it holy, not to infer that the previous six days were not holy, but that the seventh day is made holy forever as it relates

to the way God and Man should be;

(vi) God gives the day as a sign forever to Israel of the fact that He created all things; and

(vii) It is a Rest to be observed especially by Israel because once that nation was in Egypt and had to work seven days without any rest.

Genesis 2:1–3, which refers to the seventh day, does not conclude with: 'and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day'. The seventh day is still proceeding. Thus the period of all history is God's Rest day, and so Man, being in the image of God, will likewise do as his Creator does and (i) do all he should do in six days; and (ii) Rest from such work on the seventh day. What must be seen is that Man should be at Rest because of Creation, and that his own, inner Rest should be that of God. We mean all men were virtually commanded to know the very Rest of God. It was the gift of Creation.

We have seen that because of the Fall Man lost his peace, his *shalom*, his Rest. Not at peace with God, he is not at peace with himself and with others. He now has a restlessness. This powerfully affects the way he goes about Vocation, the Rest, and Marriage. So much so that God says in Isaiah 57:20–21:

But the wicked are like the tossing sea;
for it cannot rest,
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.

There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

If we can speak of 'the Rest of God' as being His nature, that is, that He has Rest within Himself,¹ then we

¹ For example, compare God's nature with that of the wicked person of whom God says, 'There is no peace for the wicked', for 'the wicked are like the restless sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt' (Isaiah 57:20–21).

see what Man is by Creation as the image of God. It is his nature also to be at Rest. At the same time Man is commanded to fulfil his Vocation, and he may think he should launch out on this command into a time of busyness, so to speak. But as God has rested from His work, Man must know God's continuing Rest. He must do his work both within that Rest and by means of it. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' There is no conflict between Vocation and Rest. The works of God in Vocation are done in the midst of Rest. As we have seen, immediately above, Man's break with God gives him a false view of Vocation,² Rest and Marriage. Fallen, he lives in perpetual restlessness; he is not really partaking of the Covenant of Creation.

We gather from the Epistle to the Hebrews that there is an eschatological Rest, the indication being that such Rest will be the ultimate reality for all Creation. Here the passage of Hebrews 3:7–4:10 should be studied closely. It shows that Rest lies in doing the will of God. Israel was promised it would have Rest in the Promised Land, but it did not achieve it because of disobedience. David gave a certain rest to the land,³ but it had to be Jesus Who said in Matthew 11:28–29:

² Note the curse speaks of increased labour in order to make a living from the soil. Even so, Man-in-faith (cf. Hebrews 11:4–38) could have the Rest of God, as, for example, it appears to Enoch.

³ See II Samuel 7:1; I Kings 8:56; I Chronicles 22:9. Through David, God gave Israel rest from its enemies. Solomon was to be the man of peace, as God said, 'I will give peace (rest: *menuchah*) and quiet to Israel in his days'.

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

There is a Rest ahead for the true people of God, and that will be when all things are reconciled at the time of the *telos*.

What we have said in the above passage is not to preempt what we will later say about the restoration of the principles of Creation. We will simply wish to show, by comparison, that Man is not in that Sabbath Rest of God. What Rest he has ever had has been when, being at one with God by God's love, he worships Him. It is always in the Sanctuary that true Rest comes.

CHAPTER 8

GOD'S COVENANT AND MARRIAGE—I

The Third Principle of the Image: the Profound Mystery of Marriage

In Genesis 1:28–30 we have the Mandate God gave to Man. Having created Man as male and female together 'God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it"', so that Vocation cannot be fulfilled apart from the man and woman. Without marriage they cannot be fruitful and participate in the Vocation. Properly speaking, as Man they are one, and are not simply two separate entities brought together and joined together. In Genesis 2:18–24 we see the following:

- (i) Man was created without a mate;
- (ii) he named the creatures and saw their unions as male and female;
- (iii) God said that it was not good for Man to be alone and so created the woman from the man;
- (iv) when God brought her to the man, who was now no longer in himself 'Man', the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man'; and
- (v) the conclusion of all of this is stated, 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh'.

For Man to be in the image of God and to be truly Man, reflecting the glory of God, he must be husband and wife together. As we have already said, God did not create a male and a female as two separate entities and then join them, a thing biologically possible but relationally not possible. No! He created the woman out of the man so that now Man is the man and the woman as one. One way of attempting to understand this is first to understand that the Triune God—of Whom Man is the image—is constituted of Three Persons Who are One. The Father is spoken of as *fons divinitatis*, that is 'the fountain of Godhead'. The Son is eternally generated from Him. In one sense we can say that the Son is 'from the Father',¹ whilst the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father and the Son, and in that sense can be said to be 'from the Father and the Son'. So then, because the woman was drawn from the man, the man and the woman are constitutionally one. Animals cannot be said in the same sense to be constitutionally one.²

Christ's View of Marriage

In Matthew 5:32; 19:1–12; Mark 10:1–12 and Luke

¹ The Nicene Creed has it, 'God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made' which should be understood, 'God out of God, Light out of Light, very God out of very God, begotten, not made'.

² Today we have the idea in feminism and masculism, that we virtually have two races—one female and the other male. Instead of the woman realising that her being is derived from Man, she is gender conscious, thinking she is a complete being in herself. Likewise the masculist holds this idea for his gender. Gender consciousness, and confining oneself to one's gender, is a straining against the creational order of things: the male and female are one together and, as such, Man.

16:18 we have our Lord's view of marriage.³ Whilst recognising Mosiac legislation in going about divorce, (Deuteronomy 24:1–4),⁴ Christ quotes Genesis 2:24 and categorically states on the basis of it, 'What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder'. He recognises the innate unity of the couple in marriage. Later we will have need to refer to this, for Christ Himself as the Bridegroom is joined to His Wife the Bride, who is, herself, the Church. Here the idea of a divorce of the two is utterly impossible.

Marriage Is a Profound Mystery

In Ephesians 5:21–33 Paul speaks of marriage. In his discourse Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 and says, 'This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it [Genesis 2:24] refers to Christ and his church'. We note the word 'mystery' which in the Greek is *mysterion* and is sometimes translated 'a secret'. A mystery in the New Testament is a secret which is disclosed to the initiated

³ See my treatment of this in my book *The Profound Mystery*, NCPI, Coromandel East, SA, 1995, and especially its comprehensive bibliography which shows the wide reading and wide differences in dealing with the subject.

⁴ "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt upon the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance".

and which is closed off from the uninitiated.⁵ More particularly, understanding of it is given by God. Christ told His disciples, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets [the mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given'.

Paul, then, is saying that the joining together of a man and a woman in marriage is a mystery. A mystery is not a puzzle to be solved but something to be lived in. Paul is saying that the union referred to in Genesis is a mystery in that it refers not generally to a man and woman being thus joined, but to Christ and the Church and their Marriage. This means that Genesis 2:24, in speaking of the marriage of the first couple, is saying that marriage is protological. By this we mean that it is 'the beginning thing' pointing to 'the end thing', and 'the end thing' is the consummation of what it prophetically indicates. 'The end thing' we call 'eschatological'. In this case 'the end thing' is the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Thus the marriage of the primal couple is not the mystery as such, but that which the mystery points to, as we say, protologically.

Marriage, the Image and the Covenant of Creation

We have seen for Man to be Man is for him to be in the image of God, and is to accept and fulfil the Vocation God has given him in the creation Mandate.

⁵ We have Christ telling Nicodemus that he cannot *see* the Kingdom of Heaven unless he is born from above. Likewise Paul says 'the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit for they are foolishness unto him', and John in his First Epistle says—amongst many other things—that no one can know God without new birth.

It is also for him to live in the Sabbath Rest of God. We must now see that it is for him to fulfil his relationship with God in the Covenant of Creation by the union and communion of Marriage. The serpent saw this fact and sought to prise Man away from his relationship with God. Insofar as it succeeded—in the event of the Fall—it succeeded in fracturing the relationship of the Man and the Woman. In turn this affected Man's approach to his Vocation and to living in the Sabbath Rest of God. In other words, Man as the *imago Dei* was deeply affected. He became out of kilter with his own essential being, and therefore with all that he was to be and do. He was going against the Covenant of Creation.

The Covenant of Creation and the Covenant Creator-Father

We have been seeing that although Man broke the intimate relationship that was his with God by virtue of Creation—the union-communion he had with God—yet God did not abandon Man. Whilst pure relationship must be mutual, yet one can hold to his or her side of a (relational) covenant even though there is no response from the other member. 'He is not very far from any one of us', and 'In him we live and move and have our being', remain true.

Some theologians have spoken of 'general grace' meaning God persists with Man, holding him back from the full, natural outcome of his fallen being. Whatever term may be given to God's action it is true that He does this. It is also true that from Abel onwards there have been those called 'people of faith' and 'the children of God'. These things ensure that marriage is not impossible because of the Fall. Good marriages are exper-

perienced by human couples, even though none is perfect. God gives some kind of grace to human beings if they will use it. Marriage as an institution has survived for millenniums. The rejection or perversion of it in the world of modernity will not destroy it: the present phase will also pass. The enormous anger that men and women have from experiences of marital disloyalty is more than matched by the anger that couples have with disloyalty in *de facto* relationships. All of this would appear to indicate that human marriage is ontological in essence. By 'ontological' we mean of the order of what is essentially true—of 'things as they really are'.

Marriage Should Be Understood and Lived in the Light of Its Being 'the Profound Mystery'

If we are concerned with Vocation and living in God's Sabbath Rest as the true way of life and the living out of the image of God, then we will also be concerned that marriage is lived on the same score. Yet what should be understood is that Vocation is protological. It is a mystery in that it is 'the beginning thing' that looks to 'the end thing'—its consummation. Man will then have accomplished his Vocation and been rewarded, and will go on to the Vocation of being 'kings and priests unto God', reigning on the earth forever. Likewise God's Sabbath Rest is something Man should now live in since it is protological of 'the end thing', which is the ultimate Rest in the Holy City, in the Holy Temple which will be God Himself. Thus in living out the image in these two ways, Man is reflecting God as His image.

By the same token, marriage being the mystery is likewise the reflection of God's glory and His plan for the

people of His Covenant. It is protological of the end (the eschatological) consummation. It is to this thought we give ourselves in our next chapter.

CHAPTER 9

GOD'S COVENANT AND MARRIAGE—II

Some Comments on 'the Profound Mystery'

In using the following comments we are trying to contemplate Paul's idea of 'the profound mystery', and this may complicate the matter for some of us. These quotations need thoughtful penetration and comprehension. What they say also jumps ahead of what we will be trying to develop in future chapters. Even so, grasping these insights should be a useful exercise.

Geoffrey W. Bromiley, in speaking of Marriage says:

In creating man—male and female—in his own image, and joining them together so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies both of himself in his trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of himself in relation to the people of his gracious election. Analogically, what is between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what ought to be and is and shall be between God and Israel and Christ and the church, is also what is meant to be in the relation of man and woman and more specifically of husband and wife. Neither the intra-trinitarian relationship nor the union between the heavenly bridegroom and His bride is a good copy of a bad original. Earthly marriage as it is now lived out is a bad copy of a good original...It is simpler, however, because God himself took the initiative at the level of both original and copy. At the level of the original the deserted husband lovingly went to look for the erring bride and brought her back. He did this by

offering himself, in the person of the divine Son, as the price of redemption.¹

Helmut Thielicke's comment is:

On the basis of this "symbolic" character of marriage, Ephesians 5:32 speaks of a "mystery". In the New Testament the term "mystery" is always used in the sense that a visible, earthly reality or process becomes a similitude of the transcendent sphere of salvation, that "nature" thus points to the "supernatural"...This kind of pointing or reference is called a "mystery" because it cloaks and reveals at the same time: the mystery reveals itself to faith, whereas unbelief cannot understand it; "to him who has, will more be given...but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away"...Because marriage points to the order of creation and redemption it is a similitude of this kind and it also exhibits the same double meaning: for those who stand in faith within the order of redemption it *has* this symbolic character, whereas for others it can be merely a contract, a biological phenomenon, or at most a human bond. This is why the letter to the Ephesians calls it a "mystery".²

Karl Barth, speaking of Genesis 2:24 says:

...as this whole second account of creation...is permeated by the reference to God's gracious covenant with Israel as the internal basis of creation itself, the same is true of its conclusion...it envisages the most important Old Testament relationship in which Yahweh is represented as the faithful Lover, Bridegroom and

¹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1980, pp. 77–78.

² Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Volume 3: Sex*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1964, pp. 125–126.

Husband of this people, and the latter as the equally unfaithful beloved, bride and wife...In the New Testament Yahweh and Israel are Christ and His Church... Indeed, now that its prototype—Christ and the community—has emerged as a historical reality, it [marriage] can and must receive quite a new consecration...as a representation of what is its essence according to Genesis 2:18–22.³

Barth is saying that the account of Genesis 2:18–24 is prototypological of God and Israel and so of Christ and the Church. He agrees that it has direct reference to the first couple, but that it is not confined to it.

Andrew Lincoln speaks along much the same lines:

"Mystery," therefore, is not *any* deeper meaning of an OT text but precisely *this* meaning of Christ and the Church posited by this writer. Similarly, the mystery is not any marriage or marriage itself, but the special marriage relationship of Christ and the Church. This is not a denial of the straightforward reference of Genesis 2:24 by any means. Indeed, as we have seen, the interpretation of Genesis 2:24 underlies the exhortation to husbands in vv. 28–30. But even that use of Genesis 2:24 depended for its force on the ultimate reference the writer believed it had to the archetypal union between Christ and the Church...It was because the Church was Christ's body which was one with him, a relationship which was the model for human marriage, that wives could be seen in terms of their husbands' bodies.⁴

Andrew Lincoln then shows that exegetically it is

Paul who is claiming that Genesis 2:24 is protological:

The emphatic *ego* and the particle *de* in verse 32b make clear that the writer is stressing that this particular interpretation of Genesis 2:24 as a reference to the profound mystery between Christ and the Church is his own. If, in fact, it also originated with him, then presumably he reached it through a typological exegesis, resting on a correspondence between creation (Genesis 2:24) and redemption (Christ and the Church). Christ has already been seen in Adamic terms in Ephesians 1:22 (the Church is his body), and so a text that refers to Adam's bodily union can now be claimed for Christ's union with the Church. *Ego de lego*, "but I am speaking," occurs also in the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, where it serves to introduce an interpretation contrary to the generally accepted interpretation of the Scripture passages in view.⁵

Finally, on the matter of 'the profound mystery' we hear from Markus Barth:

Rather Christ's union with the church has effected an unprecedented situation: the new creation leaves no room for a dialectic tension or wavering between creation and redemption. Marriage is no longer explained as a 'creation order,' but as an expression of renewal of all things through Jesus Christ. Indeed, according to Paul, the supreme love and the first work and effect of Christ were announced, promised, and guaranteed as early as the creation story. But creation itself, viz. the creaturely existence which God gave to man in the beginning, was only an intimation of marriage, not its ontological and ethical ground. Only Jesus Christ's coming, his love, his death, his dominion are the final,

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, The Doctrine of Creation, vol. 3, pt. 4, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1961, pp. 142–143.

⁴ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42, Word Books, Dallas, TX, 1990, pp. 381–382.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 382.

solid basis and model.⁶

In regard to Genesis 2:24 Barth comments:

Even such parts of the “Law” that had evoked legal, legalistic, and at times casuistic debates and interpretations (the so-called *halacha*) were in actuality Prophetic in nature: “A man will leave...will be joined... the two will become one”.⁷

Barth then concludes in regard to the prophetic:

The substance of this promise according to Paul is not only marital bliss: it is Christ’s love for the church. Therefore what Genesis 2:24 says about union in “one flesh” is for Paul a prophecy more than anything else. Marriage stands under the sign of God’s promise; it is not at the mercy of human traditions, laws, and their interpretation.⁸

Robert Jenson in his brilliant book on Jonathan Edwards has mined precious mineral out of Edwards’ *Miscellanies*:

Edwards’ answer takes us finally to the centre of his systematic reflection, to—“as it were”—his notation of the universal melody’s fugal structure: “To this I say, that the Son is the adequate communication of the Father’s goodness...But yet the Son has also an inclination to communicate *himself*, in an image of his person that may partake of his happiness: and this was the end of the

creation, even the communication of the happiness of the Son of God...Therefore the church is said to be the completeness of Christ.” It is as and only as a factor in the plot of the triune God’s inner life, that God has a need to overflow. In the *Miscellanies*, Edwards is beautifully simple: “The end of the creation of God was to provide a spouse for his Son Jesus Christ, that might enjoy him and on whom he might pour forth his love...” “[H]eaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse.” The church is *with* Christ the object in the triune love and so the purpose of creation.⁹

Jenson comments, carrying Edwards’ thoughts further:

Christ is the agent and beneficiary of all events from creation to fulfilment; “as Mediator [Christ] rules all events...so as to conduce to the good of his church, and to bring to pass the ends of his mediation,” for since “God created the world to provide a spouse...for his Son,” so “the spiritual marriage of the spouse to him, is what the whole creation labors...to bring to pass.” And Edwards does mean “whole creation,” for the material universe is, we must remember, but the intersubjective field of the community of spirits that make history. Thus he can, with supreme sophistication and naivete, say, “the whole course of nature...[is] subservient to the affair of redemption,” or again, “every atom in the universe is managed by Christ so as to be most to the advantage of the Christian.”...It emerges in the discovery not of God’s good in ours but of our good in God’s. And that is to say, the God the soul enters is the triune God, so that the soul can be one with God while yet God works his own will

⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4—6*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 34a, Doubleday, New York, 1981, p. 731.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 732.

⁸ loc.cit.

⁹ Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recom-mendation of Jonathan Edwards*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, p. 42.

that is not necessarily ours; and the universality the soul appropriates is the encompassing fact of Christ's history rather than of the soul's own religious aspiration. I must quote one more piece of Edwards' beloved spouse-mysticism, of a drastic Christianity I am not sure is elsewhere found: "There was, [as] it were, an eternal society or family in the Godhead, in the Trinity of persons. *It seems to be God's design to admit the church into the divine family as his son's wife*".¹⁰ (Last emphasis is mine).

Conclusion to 'the Covenant of Creation and Marriage'

As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the quotations we have utilised deal with material we will be expanding in later chapters. Our emphasis on Genesis 2:24 as being 'the profound mystery' arises from the fact that this Scripture reference is protological of the end (the eschatological) consummation.

Even so, this emphasis helps us to see that the image of God is not a mediocre reflection of all that God is, and what He is doing in and through His Covenant of Creation. Rather, it is a dynamic reflection.

From the practical point of view it also ties us down to the actional reality of the image of God in Man, or Man as the image of God. In the elements of Vocation, living in God's Sabbath Rest and in Marriage, Man is intended to reflect fully the glory of God.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

Section 2

Chapters 10–14

GOD'S COVENANTS WITHIN HIS COVENANT

We will see God's Covenant of Creation being unfolded through the Old Testament covenants up to the prophetic introduction to the New Covenant.

Our first nine chapters were certainly thought provoking regarding the fact that humanity and all elements of Creation have their true being in covenant. The materials we studied should encourage us to find the delights of Vocation, living in God's Rest and in the richness of Marriage.

That, unfortunately, is not the whole story. Man—the primal man and woman together—broke the Covenant. And havoc was let loose in the world, both in the midst of humanity, and with the remainder of Creation. Vocation, Sabbath Rest and Marriage encountered great difficulties. The Fall led to growing corruption and violence across the face of the earth, which in turn led to the judgement of the flood. When the flood ceased, God spoke of establishing His

Creation. Man could expect the earth to be free from an overall flood. Even so, he went on as before. At the beginning of the twelfth chapter of Genesis we see a covenant being made with Abraham.

From that point onwards we will trace four main covenants which God made with Man. The first was made with Abraham, the second with Israel as a nation, the third a special covenant God made with David, and the fourth is the covenant which we call 'New'.

Readers should note that there is a change in the flow of our book in this section. We are faced with certain facts which we have to understand and digest, so it will not be 'easy reading' but it will help us to see that God, Who is persistent Love, intends to bring freedom to the human race.

Whatever it takes to give attention to this important section, let us so do.

CHAPTER 10

THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

The Covenant of Creation and the Covenants of Grace

If we take the Covenant of Creation to cover all who are born into this world, although not all such ones accept or adhere to that Covenant, then we will need to find a place for the Covenants called Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New, which are generally called Covenants of Grace. Whilst it certainly takes grace to assist people to accept and live in the Covenant of Creation, that Covenant was based upon the reality of Creation itself, and not, as such, upon grace.

What, then, was the purpose of these so called Covenants of Grace we have just named above? In order to give ourselves the answer we will need to look at each of these Covenants. We have five elements common to them all:

- (i) they are of grace;
- (ii) they are primarily personal, to bring Man back to union and communion with God;
- (iii) they are—in the ultimate—universal in that they are intended to incorporate all the nations;
- (iv) they are related to the world which was created for Man; and
- (v) they are everlasting.

The Abrahamic Covenant

(A) OUT OF IDOLATRY INTO THE LAND OF PROMISE

The history of Abraham (Abram) needs to be considered. Stephen said, 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia'.¹ Joshua spoke of Abraham's father and family worshipping other gods.² It is clear that they were to go to Canaan but stopped short of doing this and dwelt in Haran.³ In Genesis 12:1–3 we see God's command to Abraham to move out of Haran and to go where God wanted him to go. In Genesis 12:3 Abraham was given a promise that God would make his name great, and that those who blessed Abraham would be blessed and those who cursed him would be cursed.⁴ Even so, this promise was not, as such, a covenant. It was a calling with a promise that was universal, which, as we have said, related to all the nations upon the earth.

Following this, Abraham journeyed to Canaan and there God promised the land to him. Abraham then travelled to Egypt, and after a disastrous encounter with Pharaoh, travelled again to Canaan. Near Bethel God once more promised Abraham the land, adding to this promise the one that Abraham's seed would be in number as the dust of the earth, for ever.

In Genesis 14 we have the story of the battle of the kings in which Lot was made captive and the spoil of

Sodom and Gomorrah taken by the victors. Abraham went after the army of the victorious kings and defeated them. Then happened the incident where Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought bread and wine to Abraham and blessed him, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!'. The king of Sodom offered the recaptured spoil to Abraham who refused it. Melchizedek's appearance as the priest of the Most High and his blessing have rich significance which we will later discuss in connection with the New Covenant.

(B) THE AFFIRMATION AND 'CUTTING' OF THE COVENANT

Following this significant incident God appeared and told Abraham that He would be Abraham's shield (protector) and reward, that He would give him a son and that the descendants through this son would be in number as the stars of heaven. Abraham believed all that God had told him and was accounted righteous because of his belief. His belief was not just that God was, and is, but that He was the One Who had promised him innumerable children and land and inheritance.⁵ To believe God is to be accounted as righteous.

Abraham then asked God how he would know that he was to possess the land of Canaan. It was then that God set out the manner of a ritual involving a heifer, a she-goat, a ram, a turtle dove and a young pigeon. The animals were cut in two, each half being laid over

¹ Acts 7:2.

² Joshua 24:2.

³ See Genesis 11:26–32.

⁴ The matter of blessing and cursing in relation to the Abrahamic Covenant is quite a subject. Likewise it is so with the Sinaitic Covenant.

⁵ The matter of land and an inheritance are the one, as various passages indicate. God calls Abraham out of his homeland (Genesis 12:3) with a promise. He shows him the land he will possess (Genesis 13:14–18) and this is reiterated in chapter 15 where 'cutting the covenant' is both an affirmation and a sign.

against the other, but the birds were left intact. Birds of prey came down upon the carcases but Abraham drove them away.

Following this a deep sleep fell upon Abraham and a 'dread and great darkness' also. These two elements have been variously debated but the whole event is solemn and significant. It is in this state that God reveals afresh the promise of the land and of Abraham's descendants possessing it. The action of a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passing between the severed portions of the sacrifice has also been variously interpreted, but it is clear that it is 'cutting the Covenant'. We may think of the Covenant having been given from the first point of the narrative in Genesis 12:1ff. (cf. Joshua 24:2f.), but here, without doubt, that Covenant is 'cut', and in that sense, sealed.

(c) THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

We saw in Genesis 9:16 that God called the covenant He affirmed with Noah 'the everlasting covenant'. As such it did not begin with Noah but with Creation. Many times in the Old Testament the Covenant with Abraham is called 'an everlasting covenant'. On the one hand it is a covenant made with Abraham and his descendants but then, as the New Testament shows us, it is not confined to his blood descendants. On the other hand it is really the continuation of the everlasting Covenant of Creation in that it is for all the nations that God has made covenant with Abraham.

Some Elements of the Covenant of God

(A) THE RENEWED RELATIONSHIP OF THE CREATIONAL COVENANT

Without doubt the original relationship God had with Man by means of, and by virtue of Creation is confirmed and established by the Covenant with Abraham. This assumes belief in God, and especially as the God of Covenant, so that worship is the life of Abraham in that intimate relationship. It is undoubtedly the Sabbath Rest of God that Abraham knew.

(B) THE RENEWED PEOPLE OF GOD

In Genesis 11:1–9 the nations are scattered by reason of the inauguration of languages. In 11:10ff. we have the new people of God formed from Shem and his descendants. The promise of this great nation is seen in 15:5, 'And he brought (Abraham) outside and said, "Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be".⁶ All the nations of the world are linked with Abraham and his people. The destinies of nations are dependent on their attitudes to Abraham as seen in Genesis 18:18 which says that "Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him".⁷ As already seen in Genesis 28:14 this prophecy of universal blessing is given to Jacob. In the New Testament the blessing of Abraham is extended to all people of faith. In Galatians 3:8 we read, 'And the Scripture, foreseeing that God

⁶ The promise is continued with Jacob in Genesis 28:14; 32:12; 35:11 and 46:3 (cf. Zechariah 8:13 with Genesis 18:18). See also Genesis 12:3; 17:4 and 22:17.

⁷ See also Genesis 26:4 (cf. 26:26–31).

would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed”.⁸ Thus the ‘great nation’ is composed of Abraham’s blood descendants who are people of faith and those Gentiles who bless themselves by Abraham, who are his children by faith.

(c) THE INHERITANCE

Without doubt Canaan is the promised inheritance. The Covenant has to do with land. Innumerable times, from the Pentateuch to the Prophets, it is referred to as the inheritance the Lord has given through Abraham to Israel. Sometimes, too, Israel is called the Lord’s inheritance. In Psalm 2:8 the Messiah King is to receive the nations for His inheritance, so that the Covenant of Creation comes again into sight. The Song of Zechariah in Luke 1:68–79 and Simeon’s Song in Luke 2:29–32 include the Gentiles in the light of God, as was prophesied in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. In Matthew 5:5 the meek shall inherit the earth, and in Romans 4:13 it is Abraham who is promised he shall inherit the earth, so that the inheritance Abraham was promised did not terminate with his blood descendants. Again it is the Covenant of Creation which is in view, especially in the light of the doctrine of inheritance in the New Testament. Here all believers inherit the Kingdom of God, eternal life and all that is laid up for them. They are ‘fellow heirs’ with those who are promised the inheritance—Israel. The culminating statement in Revelation 21:7 is that those who conquer will inherit all things, namely the new heavens and the new earth. Nothing of the Covenant of Creation could be set forth more powerfully than this.

The New Testament portrays Abraham as looking ‘for a city to come, having foundations, whose builder and maker is God’. It is made clear that this is the Holy City. Four hundred years were to pass before Abraham’s children would inherit Canaan, so it was not immediately Abraham’s inheritance. All who are faithful within the Covenant of Creation look for the new heavens and the new earth as their inheritance.

⁸ See also Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:14, 29.

CHAPTER 11

THE COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

The Covenant with Abraham and Israel

We have seen that the Covenant that God made with Abraham was the same as He made with Israel. In Genesis 15:13–16 the Lord spoke of Abraham not immediately possessing the land:

Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete”.

Abraham's children were to wait four hundred years, which they did. During that time they went through many vicissitudes, finally becoming a slave people under the Pharaoh of the time. Exodus 2:23–25 tells us that God had the Abrahamic Covenant in mind:

In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.

God was about to fulfil that Covenant and bring His people into the promised land of Canaan. In Exodus we have the account of His liberating the people of Israel from Egypt and setting their faces towards Canaan. Their experiences in the wilderness do not here concern us so much as God's renewing of His promises to Abraham, the same as He passed on to Isaac and Jacob. We now look at the Covenant which is variously called 'the Covenant with Israel', 'the Covenant with Moses', 'the Covenant at Sinai' or 'the Sinaitic Covenant'.¹

The Covenant with Israel: the Mosaic Covenant

Whilst there is no question that the Covenant is one of law, it must be said that it is not *only* one of law. It surely begins by being a Covenant of Redemption from Egypt and has within it its own system of societal love and God's forgiveness. In Romans 9:4 Paul speaks of the gifts God had given to Israel. These include, besides the unique law, the sonship, the glory, the Covenants, the worship, the promises, the patriarchs and Christ. Whilst law is highly significant in this Covenant, it has its place in the wider context of these other elements. Thus God remembers His Covenant in Exodus chapter 2 and then delivers Israel from Egypt. Loyal to His promise He gives the land of Canaan to the children of Abraham. Much happens before they come to Sinai and the giving of the Law.

In Exodus chapter 19 we have the account of Israel camping before Sinai and Moses going up at the call of God. God first reminds Moses of His redeeming Israel

¹ O. Palmer Robertson, op. cit., pp. 167ff., designates this Covenant as 'The Covenant of Law'.

from Egypt and bringing them safely through the wilderness to this point. He then pronounces the position of Israel as a nation before Him. In Exodus 19:3–6 we read:

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel”.

In one sense God has made no covenant with Israel, for they are within the Covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In a way it is simply affirming the Abrahamic Covenant. In Exodus 6:4–8 this is made clear:

“I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners. Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD”.

Thus in Exodus 19:5–6 these elements emerge:

- (i) Israel is God's special possession;
- (ii) Israel is God's priestly nation among all the nations; and
- (iii) the nation is, and will be, as a priestly nation, holy.

I Peter 2:9–10 is a parallel to Exodus 19:5–6. It illuminates from the New Testament this Old Testament passage. The terms 'for all the earth is mine' and 'among all peoples [nations]', have the flavour of the Abrahamic Covenant. Israel is not segregated from the nations and in some way the nations are linked with its priestly ministry.

Covenant and Law

In Exodus 19:5 God says, 'If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession'. 'Obey my voice' is significant of God speaking to His people. Deuteronomy 4:12–14 says of the event of Sinai and the giving of the Law:

Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments [words];² and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances, that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess.

² Note that the text does not literally have 'commandments' but 'the ten words' (NRSV, footnote).

What we could easily miss here is the fact that God *spoke* to the people. He did not merely *give a law*. Of course it was His Law but the word 'law' has been prejudiced in human thinking since the Fall. We think of it in terms of 'hard copy' rather than 'soft copy'. It was said by God as Divine Subject to human subjects, that is, in an 'I—Thou' relationship. That is the whole point: Israel is His special possession (*segullah*)—an intimate term—He is speaking to His beloved. It was *the voice* they heard before ever they saw the writing of it on the tablets.³ They heard 'the ten words' (*dabar*): the words of themselves being dynamic.⁴ God faced Israel as its Redeemer, and He faced it as its Creator. The Law was given in the context of grace—'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'. But whilst revealed love would motivate Israel to obey, yet that love was, itself, the Law—the words—of love. Hence the eulogies of Law in Psalms 1, 19 and 119.

We note that 'He declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform', so that 'the ten words' and Covenant are tied together. That is why some say it was the Covenant of Law. Even so, Law is not something new. From Creation it was so, and the Covenant of Creation most naturally calls for obedience because in it, Man was in full relationship with God. Genesis 26:4–5 also shows that obedience is rooted in the Covenant with Abraham, as when God spoke to Isaac:

"I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves: because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws".

'Cutting' the Covenant in Exodus 24

Moses alone can be mediator of the Covenant, as later Jesus alone could be the Mediator of the New Covenant. Moses told the people what God had said and their reply was, 'All the *words* which the LORD has *spoken* we will do'. This confirms our point about 'soft copy'. These words are formalised into 'the Book of the Covenant'. Moses built the altar and twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.⁵ The 'young men' who offered the sacrifices were the firstborn. They were replaced by the Levites later (Numbers 3:41). Burnt offerings and peace offerings carried the idea of forgiveness of sins, and so the blood was as appointed by God. Caught in basins, half of the blood was thrown by Moses against the altar and the other half on the people. Afterwards Moses read the Book of the Covenant, and the people cried, 'All that the Lord has spoken, we will do, and we will be obedient'. When Jesus later spoke about 'the blood of the New Covenant' and said it was for remission of sins, we can gather something of the significance of the ritual.

This ritual was followed by seventy elders being called up into the Presence of God where they ate and drank without being destroyed by the One Who re-

³ It is not our place here to pursue the whole idea of Law being that relational way by which the Three Persons subsist within the Triune Godhead. The Law is thus innate to Man made in the image of God, since he possesses the transcript of God's Law in his heart.

⁴ All words are dynamic. God's words are especially dynamic.

⁵ Compare Exodus 23:23–24 where worship pillars are evil.

-vealed Himself to them. Some see this as a covenant ratification meal.

Elements of the Covenant of Creation Reflected in Israel

The three elements which constitute Man as the image of God working with God as covenant-partner can be found in the Covenant of Sinai. The Vocation of Israel is shown in Exodus 19:5–6,⁶ to be God's possession, His Covenant people being the priest nation amongst the nations. The Sabbath Rest of Genesis 2:1–2 is enjoined in Deuteronomy 5:12–16 and refers to Israel's deliverance from Egypt where the people had had to work seven days. But more is spoken of the Covenant bringing the nation into Rest, a point later mentioned in Psalm 95 by David and taken up by the writer of Hebrews. Israel was to have rest from her enemies, and so, Rest.⁷ As we have observed before, true Rest lies within the Sanctuary of God. Israel as a nation was the Sanctuary of God (cf. I Peter 2:4ff.). In particular, the tabernacle, and later the temple, were the places of God's Rest. Thus the worship system worked towards the Sabbath Rest of Israel.

The third element in the image and its practical outworking was that of Marriage. In some ways the history of God's dealing with Israel is that of His being the Husband to His Bride, Israel. Passages such as Isaiah 54:1–10; Jeremiah 3:1–25; Ezekiel 16 and 23 and the

prophecy of Hosea all show that.

Conclusion to the Covenant with Moses

Admittedly our treatment of this Covenant has been sketchy, but the main points have been picked up. The elements Paul mentions in Romans 9:4 which constituted the life of Israel, plus the great Law which was the envy of other nations and the life of the people, show us it was a great covenant. We must still see the Mosaic Covenant as within the Abrahamic Covenant and so within the Covenant of Creation. The writer of Hebrews implicitly shows the inadequacies of the Mosaic Covenant to be that covenantal system which would broaden out to be universal for all the nations. Even so, the note of that principle is by no means absent in Old Testament writings which constitute the Law, the Wisdom and the Prophets. The blossoming out of this Covenant into the New Covenant and so the Covenant of Creation is a theme we have to pursue.

⁶ William Dumbrell, *op. cit.*, p. 89, sees this passage as 'a virtual restatement of Genesis 12:1–3'.

⁷ See Deuteronomy 25:17–19; cf. Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:9; 28:65.

CHAPTER 12

THE COVENANT WITH DAVID

The Historical, Prophetic Making of the Royal Mediator, the Messianic Priest King

The writer of Hebrews—as we shall see in those chapters relating to the New Covenant—has a strong point to make, namely the universality of Jesus as Priest King. The key to understanding this universality of Jesus and the New Covenant is the Davidic Covenant which God made in Israel with David, so that the universal reign of this Messianic King would be the reign of the Priest King; and thus the fulfilment of the Covenant of Creation would be the reign and ministry of this Messianic Priest King.

In order to see these matters in perspective we need to remind ourselves again that:

- (i) all covenants of God are within the Covenant of Creation, the Covenant with Noah being the establishing or confirming of the Covenant of Creation. This is spoken of as 'everlasting' and its scope is the whole of Creation;
- (ii) the Abrahamic Covenant was the Covenant 'cut', yet it was to be universal, thereby affecting all the nations of the earth. It therefore was intended—as seen in the New Testament—to embrace all nations, and was everlasting;
- (iii) the Covenant with Israel—the Mosaic Covenant—issued from the Abrahamic Covenant and was part of it. It had universal connotation and was everlasting. Its universal con-

notation is particularly strong in that, within Israel, God made His Covenant with David;

- (iv) the Messianic Davidic Covenant can be seen to proceed beyond the Covenant made with Israel, and yet is one with it. It is a universal Covenant and is everlasting, and as such is a fulfilling of the Covenant of Creation; and
- (v) the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants are linked with the New Covenant which is itself the fulfilment of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. The New Covenant becomes the culminating covenant by which the Covenant of Creation is fulfilled. It reaches its *telos*, namely, the eschatological fulfilment of elements found in all the Covenants. These Covenants are protological and prophetic of that *telos*.

When these eschatological elements come together they assist us to see that the Son is the prophesied Davidic King. He is therefore in reality the Priest King whose universal ministry has to do with all humanity. Thus the New Covenant and the Kingdom of God, which appear to be separate realities, are in fact one. You might say, they are two entities inseparably joined. Thus the Covenant of Creation in which God is the faithful Creator, expresses the mystery of the plan of God to join, reconcile, unify, fulfil, harmonise and summate all things in Christ.¹

¹ The material written above owes a lot to the treatments of the Davidic Covenant in: Dumbrell's *Covenant and Creation*, op. cit., pp. 127–163; O. Palmer Robertson's *The Christ of the Covenants*, op. cit., pp. 229–269; and the essay 'The blessing of David: the charter for humanity' by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr in *The Law and the Prophets*, Presbyterian & Reformed, Philadelphia, 1974, pp. 298–318. All three authors show the immense significance of covenant and kingdom as being one, and the transition of Mount Zion and the universalising of the kingdom of Israel into the Kingdom of God. Kaiser's essay is particularly powerful in showing that the Covenant of David is really nominated by God as 'The Charter for Humanity'—a law and a way of life for all humanity.

The Davidic Covenant

Undoubtedly the primary text of the Davidic Covenant is II Samuel 7 and in particular the message God sent to David through Nathan in verses 8–17:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away

from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.²

This passage is clear enough. Also there is the parallel passage of I Chronicles 17:3–15 which contains some simple differences. At first sight, in both these passages, we might not think of God’s promise to David—as having established for David an everlasting dynasty—as a covenant. However, many Scriptures indicate it was a covenant. Isaiah 55:3 speaks of ‘an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David’, a statement confirmed in Acts 13:34—where Jesus is spoken of as ‘great David’s greater son’—‘And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David”’. Psalm 89 is an exposition of the Davidic Covenant. Verses three and four quote II Chronicles 7:16, ‘Thou hast said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations”’. Psalm 132:11–12 repeats the thought and word of ‘covenant’. Again in II Samuel 23:5 David says, ‘... he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure’. Jeremiah 33:19–26 places the Covenant with David amongst the unbreakable Cov-

² The history of all Israel can be said to pivot around the Davidic Covenant, that is, it leads up to this promise of God and then on to the coming of the Davidic King—Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God—and so to the proclamation and establishment of His universal Kingdom, He, at the same time, being ‘the mediator of a better covenant’, for in Him, Kingdom and Covenant meet.

enants, those God has made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and with the Levites. There are many more references and they all point to the importance of this Covenant.

Covenant and Kingdom

Exodus 19:5–6 speaks in covenantal terms of Israel being a 'kingdom of priests', thus making Israel the priest nation amongst all the nations. I Chronicles 29:10–13—amongst many other passages—certainly shows that Israel saw God's Kingdom as universal. But Israel saw God's Covenant with it as everlasting. It saw itself as the Kingdom of God in a special way and that other nations were not that kind of kingdom. Even so, it is with the pronouncement of the Davidic Covenant that Israel now sees the importance of God's promise, namely that it (Israel) is to be the centre of the Kingdom of God of Mount Zion. Such a promise is important because Israel is not simply to be a localised Divine royal throne, but in the widest and deepest sense it is to be the spiritual centre of the world. It is to be the throne of the Messianic Davidic King. First, however, it should be seen that God does not allow David to build the temple. This is not fitting until David's dynasty is established, because the temple must be in juxtaposition with the Covenant. David's conquests have brought 'Rest' to Israel. The temple which is to be built will be the Sanctuary that is God's Rest for Israel. But this must be in the right order—the Davidic Covenant, and its outcome, the temple in Israel. Yet in the wider prophetic context, the new temple (to be) will be built by Solomon. But then again, beyond that is the New Temple which the 'old' temple prefigures. Thus the New Temple is the New

Jerusalem. It will be the fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant and from our point of view, the fulfilment of the Covenant of Creation.

Palmer Robertson says:

The prophetic expansion of the Davidic promise fits into this same pattern. As the kingdom crumbles all about them, these seers anticipated the greater day. A greater occupant of David's throne shall come. He shall sit on the throne of his father David forever. He shall rule the whole world in righteousness. He shall merge God's throne with his own, for he shall be Immanuel, Mighty God, God himself.³

Dumbrell, Palmer Robertson and Kaiser all go to great lengths to show that the Davidic Covenant is rooted in the Covenant with Abraham, if not in the Covenant of Creation. They trace the history of Israel, firstly, the leadership of Moses, then of Joshua, then the Judges, Samuel, and finally the formation of the monarchy, and the fortunes of all Israel under David and Solomon. They trace the judgements on the nation in the division into two kingdoms, and then the destruction of both kingdoms. Finally, they trace the teaching of the prophets. So that indeed, the literary-theological structure of the Old Testament has to be understood as leading to and climaxing in the Davidic Covenant with its Messianic connotation. This makes way for the coming of 'great David's greater son', the Son of God Who is to be King over all the earth and, as such, the Mediator of a better covenant.

Kaiser makes a special point from II Samuel 7:19⁴ which is often translated misleadingly, the *RSV* saying,

³ Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

⁴ Dumbrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 151–152, following Kaiser, has a clear exposition of this verse.

'Thou hast shown me the future', though adding in a footnote, '*Heb. this is the law for man*'. The *NRSV* has 'May this be instruction for the people'. Kaiser discusses the Hebrew which he translates in its literal form, '*this is the law of man*', and concludes that:

Since the "this" of II Samuel 7:19 refers to the content of the promise, more specifically, the "seed" of Abraham, Israel, and David, which is to live and reign forever and be the Lord's channel of blessing to all the nations of the earth, the law in this context is a principle by which all mankind is to be blessed. The genitive, then, is an objective genitive and David's response is one of pleasant astonishment as he grasps the fact that the promise just given to him is to be "The Charter for Humanity." We call this *torah* a "charter" because it is the plan and prescription for God's kingdom whereby the whole world shall be blessed with the total content of the promise doctrine. It is a grant conferring powers, rights, and privileges to David and his seed for the benefit of all mankind...So the ancient promise of blessing to all mankind would continue; only now it would involve David's dynasty, throne, and kingdom. Indeed it was a veritable "charter" granted as God's gift for the future of all mankind.⁵

Conclusion to 'the Davidic Covenant'

We can see that in one sense the Davidic Covenant is the bridging covenant between the Mosaic and New Covenants. Yet it is really the amplification of the Mosaic

⁵ Kaiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 314–315, then examines the parallel passage in I Chronicles 17:17, and translates it 'and thou art re-garding me according to the upbringing *torah* of mankind, O Lord God!'

Covenant in which it has its genesis and its root. At the same time it is the rationalisation of Israel as God's Kingdom.⁶ It, in turn, is the adumbration—that foreshadowing—of the Kingdom of God as revealed by the prophets and the New Testament, especially in Christ the King. Thus in the Davidic Covenant the ideas of Covenant and Kingdom are brought together. In its broadest and deepest sense all Creation is the Kingdom of God, so that the Covenant of Creation can, in that sense, be said to be the Covenant of the Kingdom.

Thus, inevitably, we are led on to the New Testament and especially to the Gospels in which John the Baptist and Jesus announce that the Kingdom of God is on the doorstep, and men and women are to repent and be baptised with a view to the remission of sins. Also, equally inevitably, this leads to Jesus' explanation of His death that His blood is that of the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Finally, His resurrection proclaims Him not only as Saviour but as Lord, and as King of kings and Lord of lords—the fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant.

⁶ cf. Exodus 19:5–6.

CHAPTER 13

THE NEW COVENANT PROPHESIED

The Old Testament and the New Covenant

Leaving aside the interesting fact that the Christian canon of the Bible has divided the Jewish and Christian books into 'The Old Testament' and 'The New Testament',¹ it seems clear enough from the prophecies of the Old Testament that a covenant was to be made with Israel which would be a distinctively new one.

That Israel needed a new covenant seemed clear since it had failed in the one made at Sinai, and the destruction of the Northern and Southern kingdoms had proved this. Following these judgements of exile, the people returning to Palestine were a small chastened group. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah and the Minor Prophets show them to be in need of a dramatic

renewal. Even the Davidic Covenant with its high promise of a king who would rule the nations seems to have receded almost into obscurity. Towards the end it looked as though Israel might almost have abandoned its original understanding of covenant, especially the Davidic Covenant and the worldwide hope of its fulfilment. Indeed, Israel might even have lost sight of its worldwide perspective.

Not so. We must not forget that God's Covenant of Creation was never rescinded; that His Covenant with Israel was never abrogated; that His Davidic Covenant was never withdrawn and that the prophets had spoken of two great principles: (i) that of the remnant; and (ii) that of the New Covenant which was one day to come into being.

One important factor must constantly be taken into consideration and it is linked with the doctrine of 'the remnant'. Always at the heart of Israel the concept of God's Covenant with Abraham was indelibly branded.² Inevitably the Sinaitic Covenant was ineradicable. The faithful in Israel knew God, not merely in theological or even nationalistic terms, but in intimate, personal terms. Their national sense of loss in exile was not greater than their sense of loss of the pure worship they had known in the tabernacle and the temple. Had they not known 'the sonship, the glory, the Covenants, the giving of the Law and the promises', and had not the patriarchs belonged to them, then the promise of Messiah would have had no meaning for them. No: this remnant always persisted in the face of what seemed horrific judgements and the

¹ The term 'old covenant' is used only once in the New Testament (II Corinthians 3:14). The idea of 'old' by comparison is expressed in speaking of the Mosaic Covenant as 'the first covenant' and 'formerly ratified'. The term 'new', used seven times of the Covenant in the New Testament, implies that the former Covenant has given way to the 'new covenant'. The term 'better' (used twice in Hebrews) implies a higher covenant order. The Hebrew *berith* is translated by the Greek *diatheke* some thirty times in the LXX, and passes into the New Testament in this form, although it has the technical meaning in Greek of a 'testament' such as is in a will or is *the* will itself. It seems generally agreed that *diatheke* covers the whole idea of *berith* and is therefore used in reference to the former Covenant and the New Covenant.

² Here we do not raise the question of whether the universal Covenant of Creation has always been present—even if denied—in the hearts of all humanity. If it were in the hearts of Israel, then it would give us reason to think the other Covenants could not be obliterated in their minds.

cessation of their national identity.

The Principle of the Remnant

Throughout the history of Israel we read of the rise and fall of true covenantal obedience, of judgements, of national repentance and renewal of the nation. At times the renewal of Israel in the Covenant seems beyond possibility.³ Isaiah 1:2–20—amongst other passages—gives us a picture of God's rejection of Israel in its state of covenant breaching. It is significant in that Israel seems to be keeping the Law of God. As Stephen later insisted it was not covenant-keeping. The above Scripture records:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;
for the LORD has spoken:
“Sons have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.
The ox knows its owner,
and the ass its master's crib;
but Israel does not know,
my people does not understand.”
Ah, sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers,
sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the LORD,
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,

³ For example, William Dumbrell comes up with the interesting idea that Elijah looked to God to make him a 'second Moses, the founder of a new Israel' (op. cit., p. 167). Israel had 'forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left' (1 Kings 19:10, 14).

they are utterly estranged.
Why will you still be smitten,
that you continue to rebel?
The whole head is sick,
and the whole heart faint.
From the sole of the foot even to the head,
there is no soundness in it,
but bruises and sores
and bleeding wounds;
they are not pressed out, or bound up,
or softened with oil.
Your country lies desolate,
your cities are burned with fire;
in your very presence
aliens devour your land;
it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens.
And the daughter of Zion is left
like a booth in a vineyard,
like a lodge in a cucumber field,
like a besieged city.
If the LORD of hosts
had not left us a few survivors,
we should have been like Sodom,
and become like Gomorrah.
Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of he-goats.
“When you come to appear before me,
who requires of you
this trampling of my courts?

Bring no more vain offerings;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and the calling
of assemblies—
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.
Your new moons and your appointed feasts
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
When you spread forth your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
defend the fatherless,
plead for the widow".

It is true that even in this context God offers renewal of the nation, but the desire for it never went deep.⁴ Not even the revivals of Josiah and Hezekiah were really from the grass roots. Isaiah 6 speaks of the prophet, himself transformed, preaching to his people, the result of which was to be a hardening of hearts already stubborn. But the doctrine of the 'holy remnant' or 'holy seed' appears in verse thirteen, 'The holy seed is its

⁴ I Kings 8 gives the whole story or thesis of God's dealings with Israel, their sin, His judgements and their renewal when they repent. The temple is the assurance of God's dwelling in their midst, and it is this Presence with which they must take account. It is a judging as well as a redemptive Presence.

stump'.⁵ The principle is developed in 11:1ff.—a great Messianic and eschatological passage.

In Jeremiah 23:5–6 the concept of the remnant is linked with the fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness'.

Here 'righteous Branch' can be translated 'righteous Shoot' as in Isaiah 11:1. Jeremiah 33:14–26 strongly develops this, reiterating all aspects of the Davidic Covenant as irreversible. Our main point is that in accordance with I Kings 11:34 and II Samuel 7:14f. the promises of God's Covenants with Israel are not abandoned. It is interesting that in this same prophet the New Covenant is prophesied.

The Prophetic Principle of the New Covenant

We have noted that the Minor Prophets have certainly not abandoned the idea of God's Covenant with Israel. Hosea, in particular, denotes it under the relationship of God as Husband to Israel, a theme which Jeremiah mentions in his classic prophecy of the New Covenant in 31:31–34.

⁵ See also Isaiah 41:8; 43:5; 45:25; 53:10; 59:21; 65:9, 23; 66:22.

(A) JEREMIAH AND THE NEW COVENANT

Our reference above to Jeremiah in chapter 23:5–6 certainly reinforces the promise of God to David regarding the Messianic King of II Samuel 7:14ff.—the Davidic Covenant and dynasty. This seems, by Jeremiah's time, to have almost been lost in the welter of judgements that come with Israel's broaching of the Sinaitic Covenant.

This promise is reinforced and elaborated in Jeremiah 33:14–26 so that the Davidic Covenant is certainly not abrogated, but its link is surely with chapter 31 where, in the first few verses, God shows His 'everlasting love':

"At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people."

Thus says the LORD:

"The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,
the LORD appeared to Him from afar.

I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Again I will build you, and you shall be built,
O virgin Israel!

Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels,
and shall go forth in the dance
of the merrymakers".

Then in verses 31–34 the full promise of the New Covenant is given:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them

out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more".

The elements of this New Covenant are clear enough:

- (i) it is a covenant other than the Sinaitic one;
- (ii) it is to be with all Israel—i.e. Ephraim and Judah;
- (iii) the Sinaitic Covenant was broken even though God was intimately Husband to Israel the Wife;
- (iv) God will plant His Law in the hearts of His people;
- (v) God will be their Covenant God and they shall be His Covenant people;
- (vi) they will all know God and not need to teach one another such knowledge; and
- (vii) their knowledge will arise out of the fact of His forgiving all their sins and refusing to remember their iniquities.

If we think of this as a literal, historical promise of fulfilment to the people of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, the entire people of Israel, then it is indeed astonishing,⁶ and we would be locked into this but for Jesus' utterance of Matthew 26:28.

⁶ See also Jeremiah 32:27–41 for an historical promise to Israel of return to the land and the everlasting Covenant relating to the land.

(B) EZEKIEL AND THE NEW COVENANT

Ezekiel is also concerned with the New Covenant much along the same lines, although at first sight this may not appear to be so. The prophecies regarding God's judgements on Israel for idolatry and immorality are clear. In chapter 33 Abraham is referred to as having been given the land in covenant, but—contrary to Abraham's obedience and faith—Israel has apostatised. Even so, in chapter 34 God speaks of Himself as the Shepherd of His sheep, gathering them together so that (verses 22–24) Israel will be restored and governed under the Davidic dynasty:

I will save my flock, they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Ezekiel 36 speaks clearly of God's punishment of Israel for profaning His name in the eyes of the nations. However, to sanctify His name He will restore Israel to the land, and the land to Israel. Ezekiel's parallel to Jeremiah 31:31–34 occurs in chapter 36, verses 22–38, of which we quote Ezekiel 36:24–28:

For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You

shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

The purging of Israel from its impurity and idolatry, the giving to it of a new heart and the placing of a new Spirit within it, are all promises which correspond to Jeremiah's language regarding God's renewal of Israel in covenant. Likewise in Ezekiel 37:1–14 Israel is resurrected from its state of dry death that has come from breaching the covenant. In the second section of verses 15–28 the two kingdoms are again united into the one people and David is to be shepherd over all Israel—the Davidic Covenant in fulfilment. This Covenant will be a 'covenant of peace' and 'an everlasting covenant'.

A few passages in Isaiah give us the general idea that literal Israel, whilst not being excluded, does not exclusively cover the wide panorama of the covenantal prophecies. In Isaiah 24 we have—so to speak—the original Creation and its Covenant conflated with Israel's Covenant, which is God's Covenant with Israel. In Isaiah 25:6–9 we have the *telos* which covers the nations as well as Israel:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in his

salvation".

Isaiah 25:8 is virtually quoted in Revelation 21:3–4.

Isaiah 2:1–4 is also eschatological of Israel and the nations:

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills:

and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob;

that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Yet again, Isaiah 55 is the great passage which speaks of the revival of Israel and promises, ‘I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold I will make of him a witness to the peoples, a leader and a commander for the peoples’. This comes on the heels of Isaiah 54 where God is Husband to Israel and has punished her by what almost seems a divorce. At the same time He has promised ‘the everlasting love’ and ‘compassion’ for her. He promises however, in verse ten, ‘For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not

depart from you, and *my covenant of peace* shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you’. This encourages us to think of the eschatological denouement of this Divine Marriage, especially as it is linked with Christ and, if we may use that term, His covenantal Bride.

CHAPTER 14

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE COVENANTS

An Intermission on Covenant: Gathering the Threads Together

It would seem good and helpful to review, briefly and objectively, much of what we have covered in our study on the subject of covenant and bring to it a personal application. We will then launch into the New Testament development of the principle of God's covenant for us. One indication of the usefulness of such a treatment would seem, to me, to be the picture given to us in Revelation 11:15–19:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying,

“We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast,

that thou hast taken thy great power
and begun to reign.

The nations raged, but thy wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
for rewarding thy servants,
the prophets and saints,
and those who fear thy name,
both small and great,

and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Briefly speaking, here is denoted the victory of the Kingdom of God as wrought by the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb; and it is the time for the dead to be judged, such as we see actually consummated in Revelation 20. The surprising nineteenth verse shows the temple as opened in heaven and the ark of the covenant to be seen. The ark was never opened to be seen by all¹ since it was in the Holy of holies, and was the place of the Presence. The ark itself was the place of the mercy seat with the overshadowing cherubim. Beneath that mercy seat was the Law of God.² As can be seen from Revelation 4:5 and 8:5 ‘flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder’ are signs of throne action—God's action—even when there is ‘the sea like glass’ before the throne. Revelation 8:5 and 11:19 add an earthquake

¹ This is not strictly true, for the ark was carried as Israel journeyed through the wilderness and certain dynamic actions are associated with it such as the fall of Jericho. It was present at the blessings and cursings associated with Gerizim and Ebal (Joshua 8). Since we do not know the manner of its being carried and its full history we can only commence authentically from the fact that it was in the Holy of holies in the tabernacle and the temple. Once it was in the temple it was never exposed, and certainly not as related in Revelation 11:19.

² In Hebrews 9:1–5 the writer speaks of ‘the golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded’ as well as the ‘tables of the covenant’—the Law we have mentioned above. Whilst the urn of manna and Aaron's rod are part of Israel's redemptive history, the primary elements are (i) the mercy seat, and (ii) the Law of God. Both are—to use a term—‘covenantal’.

and 11:19 further adds 'hail'. Without seeking to expound these phenomena we are shown that the ark is universally exposed and seen, and dynamic action takes place with this unveiling. We would have expected the ark of the covenant to have been abrogated with the coming of the New Covenant,³ especially as we understand the 'temple in heaven' to have no ark. That idea, however, may not be viable since Moses was commanded to make a copy of all that he saw in heaven. We ought to note that there is no covenant that does not have Law. Man's fall into sin and covenant-breaking has meant that only mercy can renew or affirm the original covenant as we saw in the case of the Covenant of Creation reaffirmed with Noah.

If we pursue the matter further, we see in Revelation 21:22 that there is no temple in the Holy City, 'for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb'. There is no temple but there is a Temple—the Father

³ There are many theories as to the destruction of the ark but the main one is that it was lost or destroyed in 586 BC at the collapse of Jerusalem. Its use is seen in Numbers 10:33–36 which makes interesting reading, as it also contains the 'Song of the Ark': So they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD was over them by day, whenever they set out from the camp.

And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O LORD, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee." And when it rested, he said, "Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel".

It is also interesting to note that wherever the ark rested by 'the dictation of the cloud of the LORD' that was really the place of Israel's Rest, its participation, no doubt, in the seventh day Sabbath Rest of the Lord. As we have observed there is only Rest in the Sanctuary of the Lord, and the ark was the place of the Sanctuary. See I Kings 8 and II Chronicles 5.

and the Lamb! The question arises, 'Has the temple ever been the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, and has the ark of the covenant—the mercy seat and the Law—ever been part of them?'. We mean, 'Has redemption and Law ever been the very nature of God?'. If the answer is 'Yes', then it means that Creation by God has issued from this One to Whom covenant—so to speak—has ever been innate. By saying this we are not suggesting that the Creator is forced by His nature to redeem that which He creates, but we are suggesting His very nature is the basis of what we have called 'the Covenant of Creation'.

Covenant from Creation to the New Creation

(A) THE COVENANTS WITH ABRAHAM, ISRAEL AND DAVID ARE VIRTUALLY ONE

We have stated that Creation is itself Covenant in that relationship which expresses Man as one with God. It is innate in Man's being as the image of God. On this score we will seek to show that the culmination of the New Covenant in the Holy City, the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and the Holy Sanctuary of God is what is to be expected, since it is what is to be expected of the Covenant of Creation. Thus, in the ultimate, the New Covenant is but the culmination, not just of itself, but of the Covenant of Creation.

When we remind ourselves of the emergence of the principle of redemption—such as, say, in Genesis 3:15—along with the evidence that from Abel onwards there were the people of faith offering up their sacrifices to God, we see that redemption did not begin with

the Covenant with Noah or even the Covenant with Abraham and his successors. Whilst the Mosaic Covenant contained a redemptive sacrificial cultus, nevertheless, it was not primarily a Covenant of Redemption, although Israel was certainly redeemed from Egypt. It was a covenant to do with land and inheritance,⁴ as was also the Abrahamic Covenant and later the Davidic Covenant.

The Davidic Covenant led to a wider, more universal idea of land and inheritance. Indeed it led to that idea of the very Kingdom of God. But then the New Covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel gave a clear indication of the reunion of the twelve tribes of Israel, their return to Palestine and the elevation of Jerusalem, and Mount Zion in particular, as the hub of the world to which the nations would flow. Thus in Isaiah 2:1–4 we have the prophecy indicating this and the true Rest of God in Creation as a consequence:

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

⁴ In one sense the Abrahamic Covenant was protological of the eternal inheritance, and the Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants are also moving in the direction of the eschatological, transcending the perimeters of the land of Canaan given to Abraham and his descendants. We must not speak of the inheritance as a purely 'spiritual' one, but an actual one, the Creation itself.

to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

(B) THE DYNAMICS OF THE COVENANTS WITHIN THE COVENANT

What we need to recognise at this point is the actual working of the Covenant of Creation, and so of the Covenants we speak of as being within that Covenant. By this we mean that the idea of covenant seems to be known to many, if not all, cultures. And this is so, no matter how simple or even how seemingly insignificant it may have seemed—and seems—to be.

More intimately we ask the question as to whether there is a consciousness of God and Man in covenant throughout the human race, by reason of Creation. The reason for raising this point is the historical fact on the one hand of the enriching, pleasant and enjoyable elements of Creation which we might term 'blessing'. There is on the other hand what we might call 'cursing': the tumult of the nations, the dreadful convulsions of the human spirit, and what seem to be innumerable judgements, to say nothing of Man's existential guilt and his countless personal guilts which he feels, and with which he has to contend. In the following section we will try to examine these.

The Matter of Covenant, Cursings and Blessings

If we take the Covenant of Creation as the reality of Creation itself we see it firstly contains warnings given at the time of Creation to Man—against death which would come from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. These warnings constitute the cursings of the Covenant. Secondly, there is the blessing which arises from living in the image of God in Creation. To live thus is to be blessed, the second element of the Covenant. It contains the explicit blessing of God in Genesis 1:28 that went with the Mandate, together with the blessing of the day of Rest in Genesis 2:1–3. If we add to this the blessing of Marriage and its Vocation, then we see the threefold blessing of living out the image of God in the world into which He has placed us. The fall of Man— death to God—increasingly brought cursing, whilst the compounding practice of evil, of violence and corruption, in turn, brought the curse of the flood. The Noahic Covenant brought restoration of blessing to the earth or the affirming of the blessing of Creation. We note here the juxtaposition of cursing and blessing.

The Abrahamic Covenant was also connected with the promise of blessings and the warning of cursings. This is clear in Genesis 12:1–3 and subsequent relationships of nations with Abraham and his descendants. Again, the Mosaic Covenant is given with rich promises of blessings to those within Israel who adhere to it, and with dire warnings of cursings to those of Israel who do not. Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim are testimonies to blessings and cursings, but a large portion of the Book of Deuteronomy is devoted to both elements. Nor are the nations who seek to destroy Israel exempt from the

cursings. Even though God may use a nation to punish Israel, He will still require punishment of that nation which is His instrument of judgement. The Covenant made with David promises blessing to the Davidic dynasty whilst it is obedient to God but chastisement where it is rebellious. Again, also, the nations which go against the people of the Davidic Covenant will meet with judgements.⁵

When it comes to the matter of the New Covenant the promise of great blessings is certainly prominent. At the same time the fact of Israel's rejection of their Messiah is a cause for astonishment. Paul's masterly treatment of God's purposes for Israel as he sets them out in Romans 9–11 assures us that God's judgements can result in much blessing, as they are rightly received, and so bring restoration through repentance, turning to God—converting—and faith.

What confronts us in the widest perspective is the immeasurable suffering of Israel as a nation, and indeed the whole matter of universal evil in the nations, of the suffering of the human race under the judgements of God, and of the ingratitude to God for His creative blessings. Only when we face all this squarely can we develop a true theodicy.⁶ The Book of the Revelation is a clear presentation of the principle we are trying to adduce. Keeping in mind the fact that, in our last chapter, we have already seen the New Covenant under

⁵ This subject is a vast one but we do not here purpose to verify it by appropriate references.

⁶ By theodicy we mean that vindication of the goodness and character of God the Creator in the face of the evil and suffering that is in the world. The finest work I know on theodicy is P. T. Forsyth's *The Justification of God*, 1917, reprinted NCPI, Coromandel East, SA, 1988.

Christ and compared it with the former Covenant under Moses, we will take a different approach to the subject. It will include the cursings and the blessings related to the Mosaic-Davidic Covenants and will then lead us—via the history of Israel and the other nations—to see the nature of the New Covenant as the culmination of all Covenants, and in particular the Covenant of Creation.⁷

This principle or survey keeps before our eyes the continuing matter of God's judgements of the nations for breaching the Covenant of Creation. God's creative blessings⁸ come naturally to all Creation, a fact underlined by the Covenant with Noah.⁹ God's cursings also come where there is the continuing breaching of His creative Covenant.

⁷ We are not emphasising the fact at this point that to refuse the New Covenant is the most reprehensible of all sins. The Book of the Revelation shows us the process of history in doing this, and the Book of Hebrews warns against apostasy from the Covenant. Blessings and cursings are wholly linked with the New Covenant, i.e. the Covenant of Creation.

⁸ See the biblical teaching of God blessing all human beings with the creative gifts as in Matthew 5:43–48; Acts 14:16–17; 17:24–25; I Corinthians 10:16; I Timothy 4:4; 6:17. The Book of Ecclesiastes is particularly strong on this theme.

⁹ The Covenant with Noah promised the continuity of Creation to humanity and the Creation itself, a fact borne out by Acts 14:15–17 and 17:24–28. As for continuing judgements Acts 17:29–31 makes it clear that in some sense God 'overlooked' the sin of the nations, that is, He did not make an end to them as at the flood, even though they deserved such an end. Romans 3:25 speaks of God's forbearance, that 'he had passed over former sins'. Even so, Ecclesiastes 8:11 points out, that if judgement is not executed speedily against an evil deed then 'the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil'.

Conclusion: the Whole Matter of Covenant Is Ever Present in Human Consciousness

Either there is a Covenant of Creation or there is not. If there is, then it will explain an enormous amount in regard to God, Man, Creation and the destiny of the Creation. For example, most happenings in history will be reasoned out on the basis of human rationalisation and not on the biblical presentation of them. Thus what we call 'judgements' and those events called 'natural catastrophes' and the incessant warring of the human nations and the families within them will be explained by what may be claimed to be 'scientific history'. Such reasonings have their roots in the Age of Reasoning and Enlightenment and their fruits in the stream of Modernity and its subsequent Post-modernity.

However, given the fact of the Covenant of Creation, it must mean that not one element of human history is outside the direct sovereignty and sovereign action of God. All things must be referred to Him as Creator, and Man and his actions must be interpreted and understood in the light of this Covenant. Human reaction to God is explicable in the light of opposition to God and His everlasting Covenant.

This, then, brings us to the intimately personal fact of us living in the light of covenant. We need to ask ourselves whether 'covenant', as a principle, figures in our thinking. Earlier on in our book we suggested that the very idea of 'covenant' must seem almost irrelevant and inconsequential to the general run of the human race. In the light of the revelation of covenant it means we are deeply involved in being either breakers of the Covenant of Creation, or, through the New Covenant, living in conformity with it.

If the former is the case then we will know an unrelieved

misery. If the latter then we will know the good dynamics of proper living, keeping in mind that we now live this way because of God's redemption and His continuing grace. Of course we cannot assess our condition as such, but the fact of being under the New Covenant will give substance to our contemplation of God and the world and thus to our way of life, the way I have called 'intimate and personal'.

Section 3

Chapters 15–19

DISCOVERING THE FULLNESS OF THE NEW COVENANT

We want to delve into the mysteries of the New Covenant. By 'mysteries' we do not mean 'puzzles' but revelations which God gives us of His nature, His Creation and of us who are human beings. He reveals His doings with us in the working out of His grace.

First we want to establish what is called the 'New Covenant', and that it is not just an idea folk have read into the New Testament. For example, did Christ speak of a New Covenant, and did His followers also have this thought before them? Was not the Covenant with Moses enough to continue life with God? Why should we need a New Covenant? What, indeed, is its essence?

Most significant of all, we see the teaching that Christ is the 'mediator of a better covenant'. What is a mediator? Why does a covenant have a mediator? Is such necessary? What is a 'better covenant'?

These are questions we will raise and seek to answer.

In fact, the discovery of Christ as Mediator is one of the most thrilling events a person can come to know, to say nothing of the Mediator's impact upon all history.

Perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of the New Covenant is that it springs from the Triune God Himself. What parts then, do the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit play in this rich drama of human history and human living? It is surprising how many folk do not know these Three Persons intimately, and to a great degree do not know the life which can be lived in and with Them in the New Covenant.

We know that these questions also raise the issues of God's grace, of the ways of human living under God's covenantal grace in the reality of God's Law which was new at Creation and is no less new in the era of the New Covenant. This is the grace of Law and the Law of grace, a reality important for the welfare of the human race.

CHAPTER 15

COVENANT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Textual Indications of the New Covenant

Anyone coming to the New Testament without having soaked oneself in the Old Testament would be pardoned for thinking that covenant is but a minor theme in the later writings. The few mentions of 'first', 'Old', and 'New' Covenants would not indicate that, in fact, the New Testament resonates with the idea of covenant. That the whole of the New Testament vibrates with this reality we shall see both textually and theologically. Even so, the Gospels open with an emphasis on the Kingdom of God by both John the Baptist and Jesus, and whilst we know that God's Covenant and the Kingdom of God are inseparable yet the matter of covenant is not made explicit at this point.

Even so, the birth of John the Baptist was soaked, so to speak, in the idea of covenant. John's father's song, 'The Benedictus', shows this as recorded in Luke 1:68-79:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people,
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy
prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us;

to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath which he swore to our father
Abraham, to grant us that we,
being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all
the days of our life.
And you, child, will be called the prophet
of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare
his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness
of their sins,
through the tender mercy of our God,
when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to
those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace".

Here we need only observe that the Abrahamic Covenant is in view and the use of prophetic teaching would indicate elements of what we call Davidic and New Covenants. The 'Song of Mary', the mother of Jesus, also has these elements: 'He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever'. Likewise the 'Song of Simeon' has Isaianic overtones: 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel'. The message of the angel to Joseph concerning the child which Mary will bring forth comports with the Isaianic prophecy of 'Immanuel', and the babe is to be called Jesus 'for he will save his people from their sins'. In fulfilment of this, Jesus later indicated that His blood was to be shed 'in the New Covenant' for the remission of sins.

Other explicit references to the principle of cov-

enant are to be found. Paul in Romans 4:13 speaks of Abraham inheriting the earth. He obviously includes the Church—the people of God—initiated at Pentecost and sees them as being participants in the Abrahamic Covenant. In Galatians 3, this is borne out in Paul's treatment of the people of faith being the sons of Abraham. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of the meek inheriting the earth. This must have some reference to the people of Abraham. Yet, whilst it was spoken to a Jewish audience, John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul all make the point that being children of Abraham by blood descent does not necessarily constitute being children of Abraham or of God. In other words it can be argued that New Testament teaching has more in mind than 'Israel after the flesh'. In Romans 9–11 Paul opens the whole question of the Gentiles coming into the salvation of the gospel, and discusses Israel and God's promises to it. The writers of Hebrews and the Revelation so broaden the horizons of ultimate inheritance that certainly Palestine as such cannot contain them. At this point we note what we have observed in our study of the Davidic Covenant, namely that it is a covenant which ultimately proves, also, to be universal and everlasting.

At the Last Supper Jesus is reported in Luke 22:20 as saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'. Paul records it as, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood'. But the explicit use of the term 'new covenant' is limited in the New Testament. In II Corinthians 3:6 Paul says that God 'has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant', and contrasts it with 'the old covenant'. It is, however, the writer of Hebrews who makes it clear that the Old—the 'first'—Covenant has been rendered obsolete, and that the New Covenant not only supersedes it in

Israel, but has universal connotation. The entire Epistle is given over to this matter, and the two quotations of Jeremiah 31:31–34 in Hebrews 8:8–12 and 10:16–17 verify the fact that not only does the Covenant bring total forgiveness of sins to Israel, but to all humankind. The statement, 'For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more', must bring into view God's forgiveness for the breaching of the Covenant of Creation. This grace, then, is seen to be of incredible proportions. The New Covenant brings all humanity into the fullness of that Covenant of Creation.

If to all this we add Revelation 11:19, 'Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within His temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail', then we see that, almost to the last, the theme of covenant is present.

Theological Elements of the New Covenant

We have to say that the whole text of the New Testament is essentially covenantal. Covenant was never merely a theme of Scripture: that is to say, one theme amongst many others. If we wish to insist on the word 'theme' then we had better speak of 'the master-theme' or 'the overarching theme'. We have said that the Covenant of Creation is Creation itself, but we can better say it, 'The covenant is the bond of God with himself... the covenant relation can never be anything else than an ectypal reflection of the covenant life in God himself... Then the life of the covenant is eternal life'

itself.¹ Without going into the implications of this powerful statement, we repeat that there is nothing in the New Testament which is not to do with the Covenant of Creation as we have seen it set out in the Old Testament. We cannot separate the ideas of the Kingdom of God and the Covenant of God, and it is simply for us to see how they are one, and yet, at the same time are in juxtaposition to one another. If this be the case then the exercise of recognising all the elements of covenant in the New Testament will be a demanding one.

Jesus, the Covenant and the Kingdom in the Gospels

In our brief introduction above we saw that John and Jesus announced the Kingdom of heaven as 'at hand'. Jesus' baptism proclaimed Him to be the Son of God, but in terms of Psalm 2 He proceeded as King to proclaim the Kingdom. Matthew 4:23 sets out His way of doing this: 'And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people'. In Matthew 12:28 Jesus said, 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you'. In other words, as the King He proclaimed the Kingdom effectively by teaching, preaching and the powerful actions that were part of the ministry, namely healing and signs which were sometimes called miracles. In all of this He was no less than 'great David's greater son'; although in one

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, MI, 1966, pp. 321–322.

sense all of this was 'kept under wraps', so to speak, to be fully revealed only at Pentecost.

If, then, we pursue the matter of His teaching² we really cannot understand it without prior knowledge of covenant. This is not to say that His hearers did not understand because they may have lacked such knowledge, for the word of God as Jesus spoke it was powerful to penetrate to those who 'had an ear to hear'. No! We mean that His teachings were not atomistic. They were not the gatherings of elements such as, say, we find in the Wisdom literature. Rather, His teaching had its very being in His relationship with God. Therefore—in relation to our subject—He was the 'Builder of the House', the 'Suffering Servant of the Covenant', the 'Davidic King', the 'Covenant Head', the 'Son of God' in intimate relationship with His Father, and so on.

Thus when we take His teaching of the Sermon on the Mount we see that He spoke as One Who transcended Moses. His words were matters of life and death to His hearers.³ When, in the Synoptic Gospels, He set forth apocalyptic teaching, then we see that all His teaching was from God and had to do, in one way or

another, with the Covenant of Creation.⁴ The commission passages at the ends of the Gospels show that Jesus and His message—Kingdom, Covenant—were, and are, for all the world.

If we take His teaching, action and ministry in the Gospel of John then we see Him as 'Immanuel', 'the word become flesh'. It is from His fullness He gives, and from His fullness that His disciples and others receive. The words that He speaks and the acts that He does are not His for they do not derive from Himself: they are the words and actions of the Father. The universal note is sounded in Jesus' emphasis on the world. 'God so loved the world' means all are included in His gospel, and it is into this world that He sends His disciples. If we subscribe to the idea that the Covenant of Creation is innate in God, and that not even the Fall has abrogated His creative—His covenantal—intention, then the Gospels certainly resonate with the reality of that Covenant.

Jesus, the Covenant and the Kingdom in the Book of the Acts

In Acts 3:24–26, Peter shows his Jewish audience to whom the message of the gospel is primarily being delivered that:

² We need to be clear as to the term 'teaching'—its manner, action and significance. Our idea of teaching as impartation of knowledge, and even of training, is not the teaching we meet in the Gospels. Jesus is prophetic, but more than prophetic. It is not even that He teaches by precept. His teaching embraces the actions of healings and miracles. As part of that teaching He claimed 'the words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life'. His teaching was not only unique, it was of a nature not seen before.

³ The authority of Jesus is seen in His 'You have heard it said...but I say to you', in the five or six antitheses of Matthew 5:21–48. In 7:21–28 Jesus is speaking as the Man of Law. What He says to them has to be obeyed for the disobedient will crash, but the obedient will ever remain secure.

⁴ The Sermon on the Mount had to do with relationships, those which primarily issue from God to Man and then obtain between persons. It also had to do with the Kingdom. The use of the things of Creation—the fields, the plants, the trees, productivity—show that the Kingdom and the Covenant have to do with all Creation, and not only humanity. So general are many matters that they can scarcely be confined to the Israel of Jesus' day but pertain to all humanity.

All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.

The Book of Acts certainly does not confine the message to Israel for its structure shows that its proclamation is to Israel, Samaria, and the nations. What is for 'all nations' is clearly stated. Whilst even the apostles may have had difficulty in seeing the gospel to be for 'the uttermost parts', yet the Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 shows that all understand the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant to be as one when Peter quotes Amos 9:11–12:

After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the dwelling of David,
which has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will set it up,
that the rest of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name.

Also in Acts, rich teaching is given in regard to God being the Creator of all humanity, that Creation is for their blessing⁵ and that the gospel is for their salvation

⁵ The two passages of Acts 14:16–17 and 17:24–31 have a whole theology of the Covenant of Creation and point to the matter of blessings and cursings in regard to obedience and disobedience to that Covenant, along with the renewal of it through the gospel.

Jesus, the Covenant and the Kingdom in the Epistles

We have already touched on the teaching of covenant, as such, in the Pauline letters and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is by no means confined to them. John, Peter, James and Jude are all part of that New Testament *corpus* which proclaims Kingdom, Covenant and the grace of the same in concerted manner. For this reason we will more particularly refer to the letters of Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews in our next chapter. One significant statement—amongst many others—is Peter's word, 'Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator' (I Peter 4:19). Peter is saying that God has never ceased to be faithful as Creator which may well mean that He has never ceased to be the Covenant God of all Creation.

Jesus, the Covenant and the Kingdom in the Book of the Revelation

The Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles do not lack eschatological teaching, just as the Book of the Revelation does not only give such. It is apocalyptic for the most part, teaching the mystery of God in this genre. Again, it is so important in regard to the Covenant of Creation that we must leave it for further examination, especially in regard to The Revelation's climactic chapters 17 to 22. They have been called 'the end of the beginning' just as the early chapters of Genesis have been called 'the beginning of the end'.

The Covenantal Nature of the Teaching and Action of the Whole of the New Testament

Those who read the New Testament in the light of the Old, and then the Old Testament in the light of the New, will come to the conclusion that the whole of the New Testament is covenantal in its teaching and action. They will therefore recognise that the key to the textual structure, the literary structure and the theological structure of the two Testaments is surely the Covenant of Creation.

CHAPTER 16

CONTRAST OF THE MOSAIC AND NEW COVENANTS

The Differences between the Two Covenants

We have generally covered the New Testament in regard to covenant, and in particular to the New Covenant, and the juxtaposition of the Kingdom of God and that Covenant. We may now proceed to look at the principle of covenant—the working of the covenant—in more detail. We have noted that the New Testament writers have covenant as their background of thinking, of understanding the nature and action of God, especially His action in Christ. Paul is explicit enough in setting forth the Covenants of Moses and Christ, by contrast, in II Corinthians 3. We have also seen his comparison of the Covenants in the Galatian Letter.

In this chapter we turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews for there the writer sets out an even stronger comparison between the former Covenant of Moses and the New Covenant of Christ. Before looking at the Epistle to the Hebrews in particular we can make some general observations in comparing the two Covenants.

The Covenant with Israel Exceeded Other Covenants

In the Scriptures and in documented history we find there were many notable covenants, almost all of which

were bilateral. None, however, equals the Sinaitic Covenant when we take into consideration those elements which Paul later called, 'the sonship, the glory, the Covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship and the promises', to say nothing of 'the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh...the Christ'. The superiority of the Mosaic Covenant is shown by the following:

- (i) it was the Covenant which made its people a priestly people: Exodus 19:5–6; cf. I Peter 2:9–10. The latter reference, when we study it, sheds light back upon the meaning of Exodus 19:5–6, and so upon the essential nature of God's people;
- (ii) it was a covenant which had Moses as its mediator. Numbers 12:1–8 shows Moses' exceptional nature as a priest-prophet leader. Hebrews 3:1–6 supports this fact, for Moses is given a unique office as God's leader of Israel. When both Aaron and Miriam claim parity with Moses as a prophet they are told by God that He has a special relationship with Moses —one that transcends His relationship with them. When, in Numbers 16, Korah also claims parity with Moses—not only for himself but for all the congregation of Israel—then he is destroyed for his arrogance. The unique office of Moses says something about the high nature and holiness of the Covenant;
- (iii) it was a covenant with a remarkable, unique worship, having the high order of the Levitical priesthood and its worship. The sanctuary was extraordinary in that it was a copy of the heavenly Sanctuary, the pattern of which had been shown to Moses on Mount Sinai. The

worship system had within it a soteriological cultus which met the worship-salvation needs of the people.¹ There can be no questioning the fact that Israel loved its worship when it was true to God. This is made clear in the Psalter. In exile true Israelites mourned the loss of that worship;

- (iv) it was a covenant which had a remarkable and unique Law (Romans 9:4; Deuteronomy 4:5–14; and 10:12–11:1). It had 'the ten words of God'—His torah-dabar Law—which was firstly the Law innate to Yahweh, and then the transcript of the Divine nature given for national and personal life of the Covenant people.² The beauty and the power of this Law is expounded in such Psalms as 1, 19 and 119. Nowhere else in history do we find such a Law and such an exposition of the nature of true Law. This is not the place for us to discuss the various elements of Law as Israel understood and practised them; and
- (v) it was a covenant unique in the history of nations in that the God of Israel dwelled with His people, symbolised by the Holy of holies, the ark of the covenant within that sanctuary,

¹ For example, see Leviticus chapters 1–6 for the various blood-sacrifices which gave some relief to the guilt which accrued from the sins of the people. Of course the sacrifices also signified communion with Yahweh and the benefits of His grace within that fellowship.

² By this we mean that humanity which is in the image of God images the nature of God by the Law in which it lives. Thus God gives a transcript of His own inner Law to Israel at Sinai, that Israel might be one with Him, imaging to the nations what manner of God He is.

and the juxtaposition of the mercy seat and the tables of the 'ten words'. God did not confine Himself to the Holy of holies, but was amongst His people in all His actions of being their God.

A Comparison of the Essential Natures of the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant

By comparison and in its essential nature the Mosaic Covenant fell short of the New Covenant. This is shown by:

- (i) the sanctuary being only a copy of the heavenly one whereas the Sanctuary of the New Covenant was—and is—the actual, heavenly one;
- (ii) its priesthood being constituted of fallible human beings and their ministry being necessarily comprised of a succession of priests because they were mortal. The priesthood of the New Covenant was—and is—of an order which transcended the order of Aaron, and whose High Priest exercised—and exercises—an uninterrupted ministry by virtue of 'the power of an endless life';
- (iii) the mediator of that Covenant, Moses, who, unique as he was in Israel, was a servant *in* the House but not the builder *of* the House, as Christ had been, and is. The Mosaic Covenant needed a better mediator, and Christ was this

- in that He had first created that House³ and then had come to offer Himself as a sacrifice for it;
- (iv) whereas the Mosaic Covenant was confined to Israel, the New Covenant was—and is—universal;⁴ and
- (v) a better covenant, a better surety, a better system of atonement (Hebrews 7:12, 18, 22; cf. 9:13–14; 10:1–4), and a better system of worship (8:2; 12:18–21 with 8:22–24) were needed and these required elements are all found in the New Covenant. In saying 'a better system of atonement was needed', we mean that the conscience of the worshipper could never be wholly satisfied or purified by the old system so that the worshipper would know the Rest of God (Hebrews 9:14–15; cf. 10:1–4, 19–22).

Even though the prophets spoke of a New Covenant to come it would probably not have occurred to those in Israel that the Mosaic Covenant would ever be superseded. Even the Davidic Covenant would seem to

³ The passage of Hebrews 3:1–6 might give the impression (verse four) that the builder of the House was God. Whilst He is the Builder of all things yet verse three makes it clear that Jesus was the Builder of the House. The 'house' in this passage cannot refer only to the house of Israel, but all God's House, that is the Creation of which God is Covenant-Creator.

⁴ We have noted that all the Covenants—Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic and New—are described as 'everlasting'. As we have seen, this is because there is only one covenant, the Covenant of God which we describe as 'the Covenant of Creation', and all the Covenants are within this Covenant, and have to do with it. The Mosaic Covenant—with the other Covenants—certainly had universal connotation.

be an extension of the one they knew since both were called 'everlasting'. The promise of the Davidic Covenant—a promise by which the remnant continually lived in Judah—and the promise of the New Covenant would seem to coalesce. Hence the later claim of Christ's followers that Jesus was the fulfilment as well as the Mediator of both of the Davidic and New Covenants, appeared preposterous to the Jews. The Church saw clearly what the leaders of Israel refused to see, namely that Jesus was the true David, and the proper Mediator of the New Covenant.

Leaving aside for the moment the argumentation of the Jewish leaders in the Gospels and the Acts, it is obvious that the apostles had to show clearly the offices of Christ as Messiah and Lord. Both these offices related to the Kingdom of God and the New Covenant. That they did not succeed in convincing the leaders of Israel does not greatly matter. Paul in his inimitable three chapters of Romans 9–11 has clearly set forth the position of Israel in God's plan in history. God's covenant relationship with Israel was never abrogated since 'the gifts and call of God are irrevocable'.

We can say, then, that it remained for a full exposition of the Mosaic and New Covenants to be given in a form which would set out Christ's great offices regarding the two. This would put beyond all doubt the fact that the New Covenant had come, had superseded the Old and was a fulfilment of the promises and prophecies of God in regard to Israel and the nations. The apostles certainly set forth these elements in one way or another but it remained for the anonymous author of the Book of Hebrews to formulate the matter plainly. This he has certainly done but a superficial reading of the Letter may miss the depths and the significance of this remarkable Epistle.

CHAPTER 17

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT

The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christ as Mediator

Having roughed out a comparison of the Mosaic and New Covenants we now proceed to look more particularly at the argument set out by the writer of Hebrews. We need to cover the first ten chapters in which the presentation is set forth as follows.¹

HEBREWS CHAPTERS 1–10

Up to the incarnation of the Son, God has spoken by the prophets. In the last days He has spoken by the Son, the One by Whom He created all things and by Whom He upholds all things. This is the Son Who radiates the glory of God. The Son is higher than the angels for, having completed His work on earth He is now seated at the right hand of God and all His enemies are being subjugated to Him. God's intention was completed by Christ, namely to suffer on the Cross and to taste death

¹ In the following survey we simply follow the text of Hebrews which, in one sense, does not follow or describe an order of events, but which is intent on showing that Jesus is the Mediator of a better covenant. Sometimes the text talks of Christ being seated at the right hand of God, now, and at other times of the work of God to make Him the perfect High Priest. Yet again it speaks of the work He does as the High Priest, in short, the accomplishing of the work of His High Priesthood.

for every human being, thereby pioneering the salvation by which many sons may enter into the glory of God. He became truly human in order to 'become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people' (Hebrews 2:17).

The history of the Son is that He built the 'House of God' in which Moses was the prime servant. This House was no less than Israel, but the Letter reveals it was much more—it was, and is, all that God has created *through the Son*.² Whilst Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness and lost the promised Rest of God, nevertheless God has provided a way for all human beings to enter into His Rest. It is by means of 'a great high priest who has passed through the heavens'.

This High Priest is the most significant of all human creatures, far transcending the priests of the former Covenant. He is one in the *likeness* of the Order of Melchizedek, but is not *in* that order, as, say a Levitical priest was *in* the order of the Aaron priesthood. Melchizedek was a king-priest of an order superior to that of Aaron, since Aaron, in Abraham's loins, paid homage to Him. This Melchizedek resembled the Son of God but was not Him or over Him. No earthly priest has a right to appoint himself to the office of priesthood. Nor did Christ appoint Himself. He was appointed by the Father.³

² Man, by reason of being created by God was a house-servant in intimate love-communion-fellowship-friendship. This is the point made by the writer to the Hebrews (3:1-6), namely that the whole of Creation is the House of God. Herman Hoeksema in his book *The Triple Knowledge*, vol. 2, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, MI, 1971, p. 524, refers to it as 'the living bond of fellowship, according to which Adam [and subsequently Moses] was the friend-servant of God, set over God's entire earthly house, so that all things must serve him, that he might serve his God'.

³ Note in 5:1-10 that Psalms 2 and 110 are conflated in the appointing of Christ as the true High Priest.

One should remember that the priests of the Levitical order carried out their ministry and died. This new Melchizedekian Priest—Jesus—has the power of an endless life. His is such an order and an office that—beyond what the Levitical priesthood could accomplish—'He is able to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them'.⁴ This is because He is a 'high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens'. So high a High Priest! Appointed thus, He is One Who is 'made perfect for ever'.⁵

In 8:1ff. the writer is taking Christ's Priesthood as accomplished. Now He is seated at the right hand of God, and now He is 'a minister [*leitourgos*] in the sanctuary', that is the heavenly Sanctuary. The heavenly Sanctuary is God's eternal Sanctuary and not the one 'set up by man'. This latter was the copy of the heavenly, the one dictated to Moses for building in Israel. Now, the writer asserts, 'Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as

⁴ We will later see that His intercession consists of (i) the act of His offering Himself as an oblation at the Cross, and (ii) the continuing effects of that oblation in His intervening in the lives of His people (cf. Romans 8:33).

⁵ One of the fascinating elements of the Epistle is to see how the writer outlines the development of Jesus as the High Priest. In Hebrews 2:17, 'Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God'. In 5:7-10 the elements of essential suffering are introduced by which 'being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek'. In 2:10 it is said He was made 'perfect through suffering', and it would seem in this verse that the Father withheld nothing of the suffering of the sins of humanity, so that in that sense His action is 'perfect' or 'complete'.

The covenant He mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises'.

It is at this point the author of Hebrews contrasts the Old and New Covenants. If the Old had been sufficient—'faultless'—then a new one would not have been needed. It was needed and it was prophesied in the words of Jeremiah 31:31–34. The prophecy calls for an understanding of the details of the New Covenant:

- (i) it will primarily be with Israel,⁶ even so, it will not be like the Old Covenant made with Israel when God delivered them from Egypt;
- (ii) it will be a covenant which will make innate to all hearts the holy Law of God;
- (iii) knowledge of God will not have to be taught to anyone or by anyone, because all shall know the Lord 'from the least of them to the greatest'; and
- (iv) the rich outcome of the Covenant will be God's forgiveness of sins. It is by the forgiveness of sins that they will truly know God.⁷ Israel had a vast body of sins to be forgiven and no longer to be remembered. Its history of idolatry, uncleannesses and lawlessness was so vast as to be indescribable, so that the promise of forgiveness is remarkable in the view of the dimensions of guilt and evil that it must cover.

The prophecy makes the former covenant obsolete. The writer then scans the worship of the former

⁶ The general tenor of Hebrews does not allow forgiveness to be limited to Israel, but certainly we should note that it is *for* Israel.

⁷ A great theme of the New Testament is that God is known as love by forgiveness.

covenant and asserts that, apart from the annual offering of the atonement which permitted the high priest to enter the Holy of holies, there was worship which extended only from the altar up to the dividing curtain between the holy place and the Holy of holies. That old system of priesthood never opened the curtain to the worshippers. In the 'copy-tabernacle' (9:9 as also in 10:1), he asserts that the worshippers could not be made perfect by that limited worship. 'Perfect' in the writer's later terms must mean, 'wholly forgiven, wholly purified, wholly sanctified'. By contrast, 'when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,⁸ then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place [⁹] *not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered the sanctuary once for all and secured a deliverance that is everlasting*' (RSV, 'securing an eternal redemption').¹⁰

The writer, having revealed the completeness of Christ's Priesthood and the total efficacy of His blood, shows that these actually purify the worshippers so that

⁸ Most translations have 'the good things to come' in accordance with 10:1, 'the good things to come'. In 6:5 we have 'the powers of the age to come'. The question in 10:1 is whether 'the good things to come' were salvific ones of Christ's work of the Cross (propitiation) or the general eschatological ones of which the New Testament constantly speaks. I would opt for the latter.

⁹ To this point we follow the text of the RSV. But from this point other translators and exegetes differ from the RSV, and rightly so. I have derived the text that follows from H. W. Montefiore's Commentary, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Black's New Testament Commentary Series, A. & C. Black, London, 1964, p. 151, with commentary following. Most translations have 'through his blood', that is, 'by virtue of his blood'. The idea of Christ taking blood into the heavenly Sanctuary scarcely makes sense.

¹⁰ Hebrews 9:11–12.

they are purged from dead works truly to worship the living God. Thus he can say boldly that in this way Christ is the Mediator of a New Covenant. It is His death by bloodshedding which has sealed the Covenant, that is, by that death secured the testament, and by which He now has appeared in the true Sanctuary 'on our behalf'. He has appeared to put away sin for all time: He has been offered *once*¹¹ to bear the sins of Man.

Hebrews 10, the final chapter under discussion on the person and work of the Mediator, is powerfully conclusive. In the first few verses the writer shows that whilst blood washes away sin, the blood of animals cannot, yet the Levitical priesthood had nothing to offer but animal blood. This takes us back to a remarkable verse, 7:12, 'For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well'. 'The law' here must stand for the Mosaic system rather than for the moral law, or as we understand it, 'the Law of God'. That is unchangeable since it is the very Law of God Himself.

What the writer must mean is that the system of sacrifice under the Levitical priesthood changes when the High Priesthood of Christ is exercised. Christ is not only *the* High Priest. He is also '*the offering*' or what we call '*the oblation*'. God has prepared for Him a body in order to offer Himself as the oblation for our sins. In support of this we say that 'the Law made nothing perfect' and that, in Christ, 'a better hope is introduced,

¹¹ Now the terms 'once', 'once for all' and 'a single sacrifice' begin to appear to show the conclusiveness and completeness of the salvific work of Christ. 'Once for all' means 'never to be repeated', 'never having to be repeated', and 'sufficient in itself'. It is out of this that the believer has assurance and boldness.

through which we draw near to God'.¹² We must also keep in mind that in one sense Christ is the Altar, that is to say that the Cross is the true Altar in the true Sanctuary. All that Christ does, and is, is authentic and efficacious. All systems of worship cease to have significance when it comes to 'eternal redemption' and 'entering into the Holy of holies'.

In 10:5–22 the writer concludes his argument powerfully. Christ's body is prepared as the oblation which is to satisfy and fulfil the will of God. The whole system of sacrifice as known in the Mosaic Covenant is thus abrogated. The will of God *for* the New Covenant, and worked out *in* the New Covenant, has led to the sanctification of the people of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ 'once for all'. Christ has 'offered for all times a *single* sacrifice for sins'. By this '*single* sacrifice he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified'. The writer takes the unusual step of saying that by the prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, 'the Holy Spirit bears witness to this'. He means that the New Covenant prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34 has borne witness to the whole action of Christ in bringing the forgiveness of sins, by Him being the oblation and High Priest in the whole action of God in bringing the efficacious sacrifice of the Cross.¹³

The writer brings his readers to the triumphant conclusion that the old system of worship, which was so to speak, from the altar to the curtain in the holy place, has been transcended. Now from the altar to the Holy

¹² See 7:18–19.

¹³ The promise of the forgiveness of sins in Jeremiah's prophecy is thus linked with Christ's sacrifice. Otherwise such for-giveness would appear to be gratuitous, not related to the Mosaic Covenant, and not having a sacrificial basis. It does have that basis in Jesus' death.

of holies there is a 'new and living way'. Before it had been the way of dead victims, animal blood and Levitical ministry, so that, in a sense, it can be called 'the dead way'. Now the blood of Jesus—the death of the Cross—has become the 'new and living way'. He has opened the curtain through His flesh.¹⁴ The House of God, over which Jesus has leadership as the true High Priest, is now open to all who would come to God through His intercession on the Cross, and now His continuous intercession at the right hand of God.

CONCLUSION TO HEBREWS CHAPTERS 1-10

Thus the writer of Hebrews has authentically set forth Christ as the Mediator of a better covenant, and the Covenant has been proven better because it brings God's people into God's presence, for ever. This, the former (Mosaic) Covenant could not effect. Now the believer has his 'heart sprinkled from an evil conscience'. His conscience, utterly purified from dead works and so far from being a 'conscience of evil', allows him to enter into the presence of God Himself. Man can know nothing more wonderful, more personal, and more intimate than to be at last, utterly one with the living God. In this remarkable way He is shown to be the God of all Covenant for the heart of Covenant is that God will dwell with His people, and they with Him.

¹⁴ It could be that the flesh of Christ had always veiled the God Whom He had come to reveal, but by that flesh being rent, God was now revealed to men and women, especially by taking them into the inner, heavenly Sanctuary, or it could mean that at His death—as the Gospels record—He had rent the veil or curtain which had hitherto prevented access into the Presence of God. Whatever the exact meaning of the text the reality of His opening the way into the Holy of holies has been effected by His death. That is what matters.

CHAPTER 18

THE SPIRIT OF THE NEW COVENANT

The Spirit of the Covenant of God

We have said that the Covenant is innate to God Himself. In other words, it is, itself, the very Triune relationship of the Three Persons. In this sense the Covenant of God is innate to Creation, Man being the image of God, and as such, covenant-partner with God. When then we say that the Spirit is the Spirit of the New Covenant, we are first saying He is the Spirit of the Covenant of God—that which we have called 'the Covenant of Creation'. As all God's works are Trinitarian¹—Creation, redemption and the ultimate glorification of all things—then we would expect the Spirit to be in the work of Creation. This is exactly the case. In the Genesis Creation account the Spirit is said to have been moving across the face of the waters. The Word and the Spirit combined to bring form and order into Creation. This dynamic act is borne out by other Old Testament references to the first Creation. Elihu said to Job, 'The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life' (Job 33:4). The Psalmist said, 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth' (Psalm 33:6). Another Psalmist said, 'When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of

¹ The works sometimes called *ad extra*.

the ground' (Psalm 104:36). The action of the Word is seen, also, in Psalm 148:5–6, 'He commanded and they were created. And He established them for ever and ever'.

All, then, that we know of the Spirit in Creation is linked with the creative Word, and this is the case in regard to God's covenantal dealings with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.² We cannot think of these Covenants without the attendant ministry of the Spirit in His various aspects of work. He was certainly the Spirit of all of these Covenants, particularly as they were within the Covenant of Creation.

The Holy Spirit and the New Covenant in the Old Testament

II Peter 1:20–21 says, 'First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God'. The writer of Hebrews certainly distinguishes between God speaking through the prophets in the Old Testament days and speaking through Christ in the New Covenant time: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son' (Hebrews 1:1). What we are asserting is that just as the Spirit was always the Spirit of prophecy and of

actions in all covenants, so He was none the less in regard to the New Covenant.

This is clear when we bracket together Ezekiel 36 and 37. In chapter 37 we are presented with slain Israel in the desert. Israel is only dry bones: 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off' (verse 11). When the prophet does as he is commanded and prophesies to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath,^[3] and breathe upon these slain, that they may live' (verse 9), then the dead army comes to life. Ezekiel is told regarding this vision, that it is the bringing together of the two separated kingdoms into one, and 'I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God' (verse 23).⁴ Whilst this is the fulfilment of God's Covenant with Israel it has something of an eschatological nature. It is future: it is different. It is, we shall see, of the essence of the New Covenant.

The point of Ezekiel 36—which of course precedes that of Ezekiel 37 above—is a promise of the restoration of Israel, especially in verses 24–28:

For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my

² For the general work of the Spirit in the Old Testament times see II Peter 1:20–21. For Noah see Genesis 6:4; for Abraham and the other patriarchs see Galatians 3:14; 4:29; for Moses see Numbers 11:27; 27:18; cf. Hebrews 9:8; Deuteronomy 34:9; Isaiah 63:10–11; for David see Isaiah 11:1ff.

³ 'Breath' (*ruach*) is of course 'spirit' and so, 'the Holy Spirit'.

⁴ The latter saying, 'and they shall be my people and I will be their God' is the statement of true Covenant.

statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Here the purification of Israel is predicted, but the renewal of Israel is by the outpouring of the Spirit—as in chapter 37. As there, so here, is the forgiveness of sins. As in chapter 37 so here is the Covenant theme, ‘you shall be my people, and I will be your God’. This purification reminds us of Hebrews 1:3; 9:14 and 10:22. The New Covenant with its doctrine of the universal forgiveness of sins claims this passage for its own. Especially do Paul’s words come to mind, ‘But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God’.⁵

Both these passages take their place with others in the Old Testament concerning the coming outpouring of God’s Spirit. In Ezekiel 16:59–63 God had already pursued the fact of the Covenant with Israel:

Yea, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD.

We have discussed the prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and the fact that Jesus aligned this with His death for the remission of sins. In Jeremiah’s prophecy, the forgiveness of sins and the Law in the heart are similar elements to those in the three Ezekiel passages. But in the Jeremiah passage there is no mention of the Spirit. In Hebrews 10:15 the writer says, ‘And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds”, then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more”.

We are surely justified in bracketing the Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophecies together, especially when we see the substance of the work of the Spirit in the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit and the New Covenant in the New Testament

In II Corinthians 3 Paul contrasts the two Covenants—the Mosaic and the New—and calls the former ‘the dispensation of death’ and the latter ‘the dispensation of the Spirit’. He says God ‘has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life’ (verse 6). The New Covenant is really the Covenant of the Spirit. This accords with a bringing together of the Ezekiel and Jeremiah passages, especially as we view the first eleven verses of Romans chapter 8:

⁵ See I Corinthians 6:9–11.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.

Here, undoubtedly, 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' is the gospel. By liberating men and women from condemnation via this gospel the Spirit brings them to the place where 'the just requirement of the law' is fulfilled in them. This is surely the Law which in the Jeremiah prophecy of the New Covenant is written on the heart and inner parts of the regenerated person. Thus to have the Spirit indwell is to have Christ indwell.

Pentecost was surely the time when the Spirit was outpoured in Israel, and in a sense, on 'all flesh'. The

outpourings on the Gentiles at Caesarea and on the Samaritans in Samaria mean the 'dispensation of the Spirit'—that is the New Covenant is universal. So we may observe authentically that the Covenant of God can now be seen in its universal aspect. The gospel is to be preached among all nations, and the Spirit is for them all—is for 'all flesh'.

The New Covenant, the Church and the Kingdom

Without doubt the atmosphere in the New Testament justified Paul in comparing it with the Mosaic Covenant—'the dispensation of death'—and concluding that in the Presence of the Spirit the gospel is alive and dynamic, and so are God's people. Forgiveness is, then, the primary experience of those who believe. Justification and sanctification constitute the life of the people in Christ. The Old Testament passages are fulfilled in a way which could not have been imagined. There can be no question that the Kingdom of God—which we have already linked with the Davidic Covenant promise—is paramount in the life and teaching of the Church, which itself is not the Kingdom, though it proclaims it.

Life in the New Covenant is altogether different from life within the Mosaic Covenant. The sacrifice of the Cross is at the heart of all New Testament teaching and living. Yet we may conclude that it is not Pentecost with its outpouring of the Spirit which is central, but it is Calvary which requires the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost to bring the reality of that Cross to the hearts of the new community of Christ—the true Covenant Community.

CHAPTER 19**THE FATHER AND THE
NEW COVENANT****God Is Covenant Father**

If we were to ask what was the richness of the Covenant of Creation—the Covenant of God—then we would have to say it was that Man was wholly in the image of God, that is, that he was wholly one with God. He was in total communion. He knew the fullness of God. Paul, in a remarkable passage, draws our minds back to this point. In Ephesians 3:14–19 he says:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We need not fully exegete this passage. What we see is that Paul bows his knees before the Father—an act of utter submission and devotion. Every family in

heaven and on earth derives its being from the Father.¹ The Spirit is the One Who prepares the heart for Christ to dwell in, so that the believer becomes rooted and grounded in love and comes to know the dimensionless dimensions of God,² and thus the love of Christ, and so proceeds to be filled unto all the fullness of God. In this case ‘the fullness of God’ has to do with God being Father and believers constituting His Family. The fullness comes through Christ and the Spirit indwelling the believer.

There can be no doubt that in the New Testament the text is redolent with God’s Fatherhood,³ His Fatherhood of the Son, that is of the incarnate Christ, and thus of the Family which is His in Christ. The question we need to ask is whether His Fatherhood has to do with covenant, and of course it does. It does have to do wholly with covenant. We will see this in both the Testaments.⁴

¹ There are various translations such as ‘the whole family in heaven and on earth’, as though there is but one family. Again, ‘the Father after whom all fatherhood takes its name’, ‘the Father of whom all fatherhood is named’ are translations which indicate an *archetype* and an *ectype*.

² Some commentators see these dimensions as those of God Himself, and others as those of the love of Christ.

³ We do not enter here into the argument that sonship is metaphorical of a God’s metaphorical Fatherhood, a view I cannot accept. I have tried to work this matter through in a number of my books. It seems to me in the light of Luke 3:38, Acts 17:28–29, and the fact of God’s nature as Father that Man is ontologically son to the Father. Regeneration restores what is lost, whilst God’s eschatological intention for Man is a sonship in Christ, the true image that makes believers one with the Son Himself, and so causes them to be true sons of the Father.

⁴ See my *I Love the Father*, NCPI, Coromandel East, SA, 1990.

Covenant Fatherhood in the Old Testament

Perhaps the most pertinent of passages in the Old Testament is Malachi 2:10: 'Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?'. Some commentators argue that 'one father' means either Abraham or Jacob, but the use of God as Creator here argues in favour of Him being Israel's Father if not Father of all who are created. Father-Creator is also a theme of Isaiah 64:8, 'Yet, O LORD, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter'. In Isaiah 63:16, 'For thou art our Father...our Redeemer from of old is thy name'. In Jeremiah 3:19 the Covenant inheritance —the land of Canaan—and Fatherhood are in the one breath: 'I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beauteous of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me'.

When in Deuteronomy 14:1–2 Moses tells Israel, 'You are the sons of the LORD your God', he is certainly speaking in a covenantal context. He adds, 'For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth'. In Deuteronomy 32:6 Moses asks in similar covenant context, 'Is not he your Father who created you, who made you and established you?'.

Israel is also known as God's son in a collective sense, as Moses told Pharaoh, 'Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"' (Exodus 4:22–23). Hosea 11:1 has it, 'When Israel was

a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son'.⁵ Certainly, from a covenantal point of view, God is the Father of Israel. When we use the phrase 'covenantal point of view' we must not think Divine Fatherhood is simply metaphorical. As Father He was Creator, and as Creator He was Father. This gives point to Acts 17:28–29 where Paul quotes a pagan poet as saying, 'We are indeed his [God's] offspring'.⁶ If we hold the view that as Creator, God is Covenant-maker then in both senses He is our Father—the Father of us all. We are His children.

Covenant Fatherhood in the New Testament

As we have often explained, if we take God's Triune Being as the Covenant Being, then what He creates from His Being is covenantal in the broadest sense. If He is Father to Man then that Fatherhood is covenantal, and it seems that Ephesians 3:14–15 bears this out. Most New Testament readers are struck by the fact that a richer presentation of God as Father emerged in the New Testament. Jesus, particularly in John's Gospel, showed Himself to be the Son of the Father. He came as the only Son of the Father, 'full of grace and truth'. He revealed the Father, and in this sense was—and is—the way to the Father. All that He does is really the Father doing that in Him and through Him. He is never

⁵ cf. Matthew 2:14–15 where the quote is referring to Jesus.

⁶ See also Luke 3:38. The question is, 'How can one onto- logically be a son of God if one was not created as one?'. We are really asking, 'How can one *not* be a son of God if one was created as one?'. This is a matter for biblical anthropology.

alone for the Father is always with Him. The Father loves Him and gives all things into His hands. Finally, through the work of the Cross He glorifies God as Father by being the glorifying Son, that is by being the very glory of the Father. This glory shines most powerfully in the work of the Cross.

Even so, it is not only John's Gospel which shows forth His Sonship. The Synoptic Gospels also show this in His baptism and His transfiguration. Matthew powerfully gives us the teaching of God as Father and Jesus as His Son in the Sermon on the Mount, where the word 'Father' is used more than any other word. Again, the statement of Matthew 11:25–26 is almost Johannine in its structure and content:

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him".⁷

Paul in his Epistles proclaims the message of God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of Him as Father to His children. Passages such as Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 4:4–6 and Ephesians 1:3–7 speak of the Son and the Spirit bringing sinners into 'adoption as sons'. This message presupposes and brings into focus the community of Christ as the children of the Father.

⁷ cf. John 6:46, 65. In John, the Father draws a person to see the Son, the Son is the way to the Father (John 14:6), and the Holy Spirit reveals and glorifies both the Father and the Son (John 16:12–15).

Paul also speaks of the Father conforming these children to the image of His Son, that His Son may be 'the firstborn among many [such] brethren'. The climax to history is that these brethren of Christ enter into 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'.

John the apostle in his Letter has a similar teaching. He traces back 'the children of God' to Abel, denoting all such as Abel as the children of God whose distinguishing marks are that they 'do righteousness and love the brethren'.⁸ John sees such children as born of the new birth, and loving the brethren with the love that comes through propitiation (I John 4:9–10). His doctrine is that to dwell in the Father is to have the Father's love in oneself and so with that love to love others. What we must not miss in the Johannine writings is that the children indwell the Triune God and the Triune God indwells them. This takes us to Paul's doctrine of being filled with 'all the fullness of God', for it is eternal life to know God, and eternal life is God, is 'Covenant God', is living in Covenant as at the beginning.

The writer of Hebrews also pursues the doctrine of God's Fatherhood, Man's sonship, and Christ's Sonship of the Father and His Elder Brotherhood of the children of God—the children God has given Him.⁹ It is God's intention, through Christ, to 'bring many sons into glory'—exactly the doctrine Paul and John teach.¹⁰

The Book of the Revelation also has references to God's Fatherhood. In 7:3 the 144,000 are sealed from

⁸ Note that the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 speaks of 'the people of faith' and he uses Abel as his starting point for this community.

⁹ See 2:9–17; 12:3–11.

¹⁰ Here I John 3:13 is relevant. 'We shall be like Him', is the key to what we shall be.

harm. In 14:1 the name of the Father is written on their foreheads. In 22:4 all who are in the Holy City have the name of the Father written on their foreheads. This is the culmination of the Covenant. John 11:51–52 speaks of the necessity of Jesus dying for the people so as to make it possible ‘to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad’. This is really the essence of Hebrews 2:9–10 where the death of the Cross brings ‘many sons to glory’.

**Conclusion: the Father Is Covenant Head Who
Will Bring His Covenant to
Its Culmination—the Eschatological
Gathering In of the Family**

We have seen that Christ the Son is the Mediator of the New Covenant, and indeed, as such, is the Mediator of the Covenant of God, the Covenant of Creation. The Holy Spirit is ‘the Spirit of Covenant’ and, as such, the Spirit of the Covenant Community. The Father is the Father of this Community which is His Family. This was His intention from before Creation to bring His Family together through His Son.

We are given to understand that through us indwelling God and God indwelling us, we come into possessing ‘all the fullness of God’ and being possessed by the same. Whilst such indwelling is now by faith and not by sight, yet this indwelling by faith is nevertheless a reality, and in the *telos* it will be true by sight. What is most pertinent to us, now, and most important also, is the fact that the Covenant people are truly Family. This is the freedom the children of God know in time—like now! This is Covenant freedom now and forever, since the Covenant is ‘the everlasting covenant of peace’.

Section 4

Chapters 20–21

THE POWER OF IMAGES

Christ, the Son of God, is the true image of God. In our first nine chapters we discussed the matter of the Covenant being innate in God but made with Man in His Creation. We saw that to be the image of God was to reflect Him as He is and in what He does. The ways of doing this were through Vocation, resting in God’s Sabbath Rest, and living out human marriage as man and woman within the Marriage of God the Husband and His people, the Bride.

This reflecting of God was tested in the garden, and Man failed. Hence there was what we call ‘a fall’. The outcome of this was that Man did not fully reflect God. Whilst the image was not destroyed, it was not functioning wholly in the way God had created it to function. Whilst blessing had been the order of Creation, now cursing enters into the human scene, and in fact, the whole of Creation.

In chapters 20 and 21, we will see that Christ as the Son of God is the true image of God. Whereas created Man was the reflection of the glory of God, Christ is the actual radiation of that glory, and not only its reflection. This reality is of tremendous significance

and consequence to all Creation, and no less to Man himself. It is this because Christ is the Head of the Covenant of God. A cogent argument by Herman Hoeksema shows that Man is the image of God only because he was that *in Christ* at the beginning of Creation. Now he is that image more than ever, so to speak, in and through the New Covenant, by virtue of God's renewing grace.

Everything we are and everything we have is in Christ, the true image of God and the Head of all Covenants, including the culminating one, the New Covenant. As Christ's people and as His present Bride, the Church, we live out everything that is Christ for we participate wholly in Him. This is vastly different from striving to live an ethical life by our own efforts under what seems to be the command of God.

These are some of the things which are most immediate. They are vital for practical living, what we call 'Christian living'. They give us a constant sense of the reality of life in Christ. What we lost at the Fall is restored in Christ Who renews us in Himself, the true image of God.

CHAPTER 20

THE COVENANT AND IMAGES—I

Creation, Covenant, and Man the Image of God

We have seen how the nature of God is, Himself, Covenant. Thus no covenant has to be made or stated explicitly. We have seen, too, how the Covenant is in being by virtue of God being the Creator. God, in creating Man created him in His own image and likeness so that Man—man and woman together—would participate as covenant-partners.¹ Man, by reason of being created by God was a house-servant in intimate love-communion-fellowship-friendship.² God had created Man in His own image and likeness. As Genesis 1:26–28 says:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and

¹ Herman Hoeksema in his book, *The Triple Knowledge*, loc. cit., speaks of paradise as the House of God and states: 'In the first paradise we behold the first, the earthly realisation of the covenant of friendship'. He adds the fascinating thought that what God had in view was not the first Adam but the last, not the first paradise but the last. 'The original creation is an image of the new world that is to come. But it is not its beginning. The first man is the image of the second, but he can never develop into him'.

² See footnote 2 chapter 17.

over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth".

The Nature of the Image

Made out of dust (cf. I Corinthians 15:47–48), Man was and is the image of God. We have said that this image lay in his oneness with God, and that this oneness is primarily relational. This means that Man related wholly to God, to others³ and to Creation.⁴ We saw that it also meant that the outworking of the image lay in: (i) practising the Vocation—the fulfilling of the Mandate of Genesis 1:28f.; (ii) living in the Sabbath Rest of God; and (iii) human marriage,⁵ whilst at the same time par-

³ Here we are using the term 'Man' generically. To be in the first created Man means the whole human race is one humanity (cf. Romans 5:12–21) and its members relate to one another. Each is a neighbour to the other. The image of God is, of course, corporate, and if we may speak of God having endless variety and innumerable facets within Himself, then we can speak of the whole image—that is, all humanity—reflecting the totality of God's being.

⁴ That is, Man reflects God as love by virtue and practice of these elements of relationships—to God, others and the Creation.

⁵ We recognise that not all human beings marry, but by being sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, they are participating in human marriages that obtain. And in their relationship with God they participate in the Divine-human Marriage of God and His people. To be in covenant is to be in this participation. For an example, see Isaiah 54.

ticipating with God in the Divine-human Marriage of God and His people.

Theologians have come up with many views of what constitutes the image of God. Some argue that Man is not the image of God, but is *in* His image. Others argue that Man *is* the image of God—as Paul would seem to argue in I Corinthians 11:3. Some see God as King of all His Creation and that Man the image is the visible representation of the King. Thus the Mandate in Genesis 1:28f. is the way in which God is shown to be King—by Man the image. This seems to be shown in Genesis 9:1–7 when the Covenant of Creation is confirmed. The question arises first, 'Who, how and what is God the King?' and then the answer is supplied by the elements we have suggested above. The King is personal Being: hence the image must contain the vocational, restful and relational elements of the King.

Genesis 9:1–7 shows us clearly that the image of God was not lost at the Fall, though undoubtedly it was marred or fractured and in this sense does not reflect God in proper manner. Theologians debate strongly whether the image was or was not lost. Some theologians speak of structure and function, stating that whilst the structure was not lost the action of function terminated.⁶ In a commentary on Genesis, Meredith G. Kline said, 'This divine image is neither losable nor

⁶ Against this position it is argued that structure presupposes function and that there cannot be a structure without function. This adds weight to M. G. Kline's statement that follows, namely that the image is irreducible but reversible.

reducible, but its ethical direction is reversible'.⁷ When Paul says, 'And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins',⁸ he is indicating total depravity. When we ask what God has done about Man violating His Covenant, our next section seeks to provide the answer, namely that all human beings are under God's Covenant and receive either cursings or blessings according to their responses and reactions to the Covenant.

The Image and the Matter of Covenant, Cursings and Blessings

If we take the Covenant of Creation as the reality of Creation itself, we see it contains warnings against death which would come from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and also the fact of blessing by living in the image of God in Creation. To live thus is to be blessed, and the explicit blessing of God in Genesis 1:28 that went with the Mandate, as also the blessing of the day of Rest, show the two elements we have named. If we add to this the blessing of Marriage and its Vocation, then we see the threefold blessing of living out the image of God in the world into which He has placed us. The fall of Man—death to God—increasingly brought cursings. And the compounding practice of evil, of

violence and corruption, in turn brought the curse of the flood. The Noahic Covenant brought restoration of blessing to the earth or the affirming of the blessing of Creation.

Covenants, whether the over-arching one of Creation, or the Covenant with Moses, the later one with Israel, and then the one with David, all have mentions of both cursing and blessing. In Genesis 12:1–3 nations will receive blessing if they associate themselves with Abraham, or they will receive cursings if they curse Abraham. Israel is enjoined in Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 to agree to certain cursings coming upon those who did not obey God's Law. On the other hand, if they were to listen to God they would know the way of blessing which came from obedience to His Law. God undoubtedly used foreign nations to punish Israel, but that did not exempt those nations from the punishments He would bring on them for the very things they had done.

What confronts us is the immeasurable suffering of Israel as a nation, and indeed the whole matter of universal evil, of the suffering of the human race under the judgements of God, and of the ingratitude to God for His creational blessings. Only when we face all this squarely can we develop a true theodicy. The Book of the Revelation is a clear presentation of the principle we are trying to adduce. Let us keep in mind the fact that, in our last chapter, we have already seen the New Covenant under Christ and compared it with the former Covenant under Moses. Yet, as we have said in chapter 14, via the history of Israel and the other nations we will take a different approach to the subject which includes the cursings and the blessings related to the Mosaic -Davidic Covenants. This can then lead us on to the nature of the New Covenant as the culmination of all

⁷ M. G. Kline commenting in his commentary on Genesis in The New Bible Commentary: Revised, IVP, Leicester, 1970, p. 83.

⁸ It is clear from Romans 5:12–21 that Man died in Adam (cf. Genesis 2:17; 3:1–6). His 'dead works' (Hebrews 9:14) are the actions of dead or totally depraved persons. Whilst Man is said to exist biologically (i.e. he is in *bios*) yet he is not in true life (*zoe*, i.e. the life of God).

Covenants, and, in particular the Covenant of Creation.⁹

You will recall in chapter 14 that we have said this principle keeps before our eyes the continuing matter of God's judgements of the nations for breaching the Covenant of Creation. God's creative blessings come naturally to all Creation, a fact underlined by the Covenant with Noah.¹⁰

Christ, Mediator of the New Covenant as the True Image of God

It is not easy to distinguish in the New Testament when the term 'the Son' is used, as to whether or not this refers to the Son as He always is, and especially as He was prior to the incarnation. For example: Is the Son the image of God as a Member of the Triune Godhead? Is He the image as the incarnate Son, Adam being the image of God? Is it, in fact, that Christ is the image and more so because 'in Him all the fulness of God was

⁹ Let it also be said again we are not emphasising the fact at this point that to refuse the New Covenant is the most reprehensible of all sin. The Book of the Revelation shows us the process of history in doing this, and the Book of Hebrews warns against apostasy from the Covenant. Blessings and cursings are wholly linked with the New Covenant, i.e. the Covenant of Creation.

¹⁰ Let us be reminded that the Covenant with Noah promised the continuity of Creation to humanity and the Creation itself, a fact borne out by Acts 14:15–17 and 17:24–28. As for continuing judgements, Acts 17:29–31 makes it clear that in some sense God 'overlooked' the sin of the nations, that is, He did not make an end to them as at the flood, even though they deserved such an end. Romans 3:25 speaks of God's forbearance, that 'he had passed over former sins'. Even so, Ecclesiastes 8:11 points out that if judgement is not executed speedily against an evil deed then the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.

pleased to dwell' (Colossians 1:19), because 'in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:3) and 'in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily' (Colossians 2:9)?

Colossians 1:15–20 seems to refer in verse fifteen to Christ, that is as God appointed Him the Christ. In verse sixteen Paul refers to what Christ did—and does—as the second Person of the Trinity, in His preincarnate condition, namely effecting the creation of all things. Verse seventeen seems to follow this meaning. Verse eighteen must speak primarily of the incarnate Christ yet the 'before' indicates the second Member of the Trinity is His essence. Verses nineteen and twenty seem to refer to His incarnate being and work.

Did the *kenosis* of Philippians 2:7f. mean He surrendered the things, the essence of His deity? Not in any way. To become Man might well be part of true deity, especially in regard to the action of redeeming love.¹¹ These 'things of his deity' simply were present—hidden—in His humanity. In His humanity the fullness of the Godhead dwelt (dwells) bodily.¹² An interesting point is seen in John 5:21–29. Is the Son here spoken of as One incarnate? Has God already given Him, as the second Member of the Trinity, the powers of which He here speaks, or were they 'given' before Creation (cf. John 17:24)? John 5:26–27 speaks of the Father granting the Son to have life in Himself, and then having

¹¹ By this we mean that the Son did not become incarnate as a remedy to meet a contingency, but that Man was made in the image of God so that the Son could become Man. Also the principle of 'count others better than yourselves' and 'look...to the interest of others' (Philippians 2:3–4) is shown in the incarnation in a glorious way.

¹² Here the question is raised: Is Christ's present vicarious humanity indwelt *bodily* by the Godhead?

given Him authority to execute judgement 'because He is the Son of Man'. Obviously Christ is given the authority to judge in His being as 'the Son of Man'. Did He have that authority before becoming Man? Luther presents the matter of Christ's deity and humanity subsisting in the one person:

Eternal and infinite power is given unto the man, Christ, not because of his humanity, but because of his divinity. For the divinity alone created all things, without any help of the humanity; nor did the humanity conquer sin and death...Therefore the humanity alone would have effected nothing, but the divinity, joined with the humanity, alone did all things, and the humanity because of the divinity.¹³

From Colossians 1:19, 2:3, and 2:9 it would seem that Christ was so filled with God that He was without doubt God's image, and in a way in which Adam was not, because:

- (i) Christ was the Man from heaven whose image is not of dust—as was (is) Adam's—but of heaven (I Corinthians 15:45–49). Adam was 'a living being' but Christ is 'a life-giving spirit'; and
- (ii) Adam was never in the image of God, as was Christ in the state described in the Colossian passages.

Conclusion: Christ the Image of God

Christ as the Man was truly the image of God. But when we say that, what do we mean—the image of the

Triune God or the image of the Father? Christ told Philip, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father'. He said that He was in the Father and the Father in Him, which is significant.

Was Christ as the preincarnate Son the image of God? If so, what would that mean? It would seem from Hebrews 1:2a that the work He did in Creation makes the description of Him as bearing 'the very stamp of His nature' to do with His preincarnate state. Because Hebrews 1:3–4 speaks of His redemptional work, then the image still obtains in His human state.

It seems clear, then, that the Son, as the Son, was always the image of God, the whole Godhead, and certainly so in His humanity.

¹³ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, James Clarke, London, 1953 (1575), p. 258.

CHAPTER 21

THE COVENANT AND IMAGES—II

Christ the True Image of God,
the Head of the Covenant

Whatever we may say about the preincarnate Christ as being the image of the whole Godhead, one thing is certain, that He was always the image of the Father. Hebrews 1:3a represents Him not simply as the reflection of God and His glory but the radiation of God.

Shortly we will look at what it means for us to be in Christ. Firstly we must see that if there was a head to the Covenant of God, that is the Covenant of Creation, then it was Adam. Romans 5:12–21 is immensely important because it tells us that when Adam sinned, all sinned. That is, all violated the Covenant. Hence in I Corinthians 15:21 Paul says: 'For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive'. Adam failed to render covenantal obedience. Christ rendered total obedience. He not only fulfilled the covenantal Law by His obedience, but He fulfilled it in His active and passive obedience¹ by redeeming His

people, those given to Him.² Adam was 'the man of dust', and Christ, 'the last Adam', was 'the man from heaven'. All humanity bears the image of the man of dust, and all the elect bear the image of the Man of heaven (I Corinthians 15:45–49). Without doubt, then, as Adam was the head of the Covenant of God, so Christ is the Head of the New Covenant.

Excursus: Christ the Head
of the Covenant of God

Herman Hoeksema virtually argues that, in fact, Adam was not the true head of the Covenant of Creation but Christ was. He does not put it in terms of 'head' and does not think so much of the beginning of Covenant as its end. Christ as the Son is truly that. Yet, Hoeksema argues theologically that Christ being the beginning of all Creation precedes Adam in position and effectiveness. In his exposition he seeks to show that the Son as a Member of the Trinity is 'one thing' but Christ as the incarnate Son is seen as the Mediator of the Covenant. The first must not be confused with the second:

For of the Son according to His divine nature it cannot be said that He is the firstborn of every creature...For this expression certainly must be explained in the light of the similar expression in verse 18 [Colossians 1:18], the firstborn from the dead...There can be no doubt, therefore, that the passage [Colossians 1:14–20] speaks of the Son as He was ordained in the decree of the Triune God to be Lord and Christ...It is the Father's good

¹ In theological understanding 'active obedience' is the fulfilling of the Law, the fulfilling of the Covenant. 'Passive obedience' is the obedience of the death of the Christ, and we might call it 'redeeming obedience'. See Philippians 2:5–11.

² Jesus speaks of His flock, of His Church, and especially of 'all whom thou hast given him': 'kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me', and so on. John 17:2, 6, 9, 12.

pleasure that in Him should all the fullness dwell, that through Him all the glory of the covenant life would radiate *ad extra*.³ For He is the beginning; and as the beginning He is the firstborn from the dead. Also this sounds strange indeed when we try to explain these words from the viewpoint of history. For in that case, not death and the resurrection from the dead are the beginning, but creation is. But this passage does not speak about history, but about the good pleasure of the Father, that is, of the Triune God. And in that good pleasure of the Father that which is the end in history is the beginning in the decree. That end is not creation, but recreation. It is not Adam, but Christ. All things in heaven and in earth, united in Christ and reconciled to God,—that is the end! But of that end Christ as the firstborn of the dead is exactly the *beginning*, that is, the beginning in the counsel of God. That, therefore, is first in God's good pleasure. The Son is ordained as the firstborn from the dead, in order that in Him should all the fulness dwell. And thus, in the counsel of God and as the firstborn from the dead, He is also the firstborn of every creature. He is before Adam, not only in order of time, but also in the logical sense of the word. In the counsel of God all creatures follow upon the One that is raised from the dead, the beginning. The beginning in the firstborn from the dead is not repair work of the beginning in Adam; but Adam, in connection with all things, was in the counsel of God so ordained that all things were adapted to the one that is the firstborn from the dead. *Around Him, in Whom, according to the Father's good pleasure, all things must be united, in Whom even the fulness of the Godhead would dwell bodily, everything is concentrated unto the realisation of God's covenant* [my emphasis]

³ *ad extra*: the work done by the Trinity in its economic nature—creating, redeeming works outside the Godhead that flow to the world; *in extra*: those works done within the Godhead between the Three Persons, Father, Son and Spirit.

Not creation, not the fall, not the church, not the predestination of the elect, not even the incarnation, not the cross, are first in the good pleasure of God; but the firstborn from the dead, the glorified Christ, is first. He is the firstborn of every creature, the beginning.⁴

All in Christ Are Incorporated in Him, Not Only as the Head of the New Covenant but the New Covenant Itself

Readers of the New Testament Epistles, especially those of St Paul, will be familiar with his 'in Christ' statements. He also uses 'by Christ' and 'through Christ' as expressions of the actions of those in Christ. The writer of the Book of Hebrews emphasises the fact that Jesus is the Initiator and Completer of our faith, that He is the Founder of the Household of God, and that He is the Mediator of His people not only for their salvation but for all their lives. He is the Minister (*leitourgos*) in the true Sanctuary of God. Peter in his First Letter sees the people of God as the living Temple, offering the sacrifices through Christ. In all these aspects then, the people of God are viewed through the person and work of Christ and are seen as offering the obedience of Christ. This is seen clearly in Ephesians 1:3–14 and Romans 5:12–21.

In pursuance of this matter of Christ as the Head of the Covenant and of His people, the Church,⁵ we need to see all that Christ is in Himself in the context of the New Covenant and see that He is Head of the Covenant, embodying it in Himself.

⁴ Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, op. cit., pp. 332–333.
⁵ Ephesians 5:23–25 (cf. 1:22–23).

(I) CHRIST, THE DAVIDIC KING.

If Christ is 'great David's greater Son' then He is linked with the prophecies and promises of the Davidic Covenant and so with the New Covenant. Without opening up this vast subject we can see from His baptism that He was attested as the Son-King spoken of in Psalm 2 and also the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42:1ff. His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was interpreted by His followers as the entry of the Davidic King. In Revelation 5:5 He is described as 'the Lion of...Judah', as so in the associated prophecies of Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 11:10ff. and Jeremiah 23:5ff.

(II) CHRIST, THE TRUE SHEPHERD

He claimed to be the true Shepherd in John 10, and in doing so indicated the elect—the ones whom God had given Him—as being His flock. The claim to being the Shepherd has its roots in Ezekiel 34 and 36, where the true shepherd is David, appointed by God the Divine Shepherd of His people. Both Peter and the writer of Hebrews speak of Jesus as the 'chief Shepherd' and 'the great Shepherd of the sheep'. This theme is also denoted in Revelation 7:17. We should keep in mind the fact that kings were known as the shepherds of their people, their people being their flock.

(III) CHRIST, THE SON—THE SUPERIOR ONE.

Not only is He the Son as affirmed at His baptism and His transfiguration, but in John's Gospel He is also affirmed as the Son Who does the will of His Father, for the Father is ever with Him, giving all

things into His hands. These ideas are carried through into the Epistles in quite powerful form. In Hebrews, Christ is the Son Who is superior to angels, who are otherwise the greatest of celestial beings. In Hebrews 1 His superiority to angels is linked with His being Creator of all things, the King whose sceptre is for ever and ever. We see in I Corinthians 15:24–28 that He is the great Overcomer, but in overcoming He gives the Kingdom to the Father that 'God may be all in all'.

(IV) CHRIST, THE SUFFERING AND EXALTED SERVANT

In Mark 10:45 Jesus made it clear that He came not to be served but to serve. His way of serving is shown in Philippians 2:5–11. It is by way of His incarnation and that obedience which we may now call 'covenantal'. Isaiah chapters 40–66 are rich with prophecies concerning covenant, and particularly with the Suffering Servant Who will be greatly marred and bruised for His people yet Who will be 'highly exalted' (Isaiah 42:13–53:12; cf. Philippians 2:5–11).

(V) CHRIST, THE SON OF MAN

The 'Son of Man' is also a term, office or assignation as seen in the 'great history' such as in Daniel 7, where the 'son of man' is given the kingdoms of the world. Mark uses the term 'son of man' in regard to the One Who has authority to forgive sins, Who is Lord of the Sabbath, whilst John uses the same term for the One to Whom all authority has been given. It speaks of humanity but is apposite to His being the Son of God.

(vi) CHRIST, THE TRUE VINE

In John 15 Jesus is virtually claiming He is Israel, especially in the light of Isaiah 5:1ff. But He is the true Vine, that is, the Vine which brings forth fruit as against the vine of Isaiah 5. This figure tells us much concerning His being Covenant Head. There can be those who are in Him, but who will perish because they refuse the fruitfulness native to the Vine.

(vii) CHRIST, THE APOSTLE AND HIGH PRIEST OF OUR CONFESSION

The 'Apostle and High Priest of our confession' statement, which is made at the beginning of Hebrews 3, is important because it speaks of God's House which the Son has created. Moses is a steward and servant in this House, but Christ is its Builder. The House is God's as it pertains to Creation itself. In one sense all Creation is the House of God. In a more limited sense the House is the people of God and the holy Sanctuary. Christ is the Apostle of our confession. The apostle is one sent, and in the case of Christ, sent by the Father. The 'confession' can be His confession for us as High Priest before the Father. But then what results from all Christ's action—the salvation through His being the Oblation, Offerer and in a sense the Altar, the Cross—becomes our confession. He confesses our sins as Sin-Bearer. We now have a confession of faith, but, as in Galatians 2:20, it springs from His faith, His faithfulness. Also our High Priest is a continuing one, for His ministry is by 'the power of an indestructible life'.

There are other figures which are important, but what is significant for us is that to be 'in Christ' is to be partakers of all that Christ is and to be accounted by God as having, and as being, all that Christ is. Thus in regard to His Kingship we are His subjects and yet 'a kingdom of priests', and indeed are partakers of His Kingdom. In regard to His Priesthood we are, again, 'kings and priests unto our God'. In regard to His Sonship, we are all 'sons of God through Christ Jesus', for in baptism we all put on Christ, that is, put on His Sonship and so share in it. In regard to His Suffering Servanthood we are all servants and called to share in the fellowship of His suffering.

So we could go on. But we have said and seen enough to know that Christ is the Covenant which had its beginning at Creation, which was established with Noah, 'cut' with Abraham and then Israel, and promised to David and made explicit in the prophecies of the New Covenant in the Person of Jesus Christ—Immanuel, God come down to dwell with His people, as His Covenant promises ever stated. This is the meaning of 'He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing' which means that Christ has become everything to us; 'God's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption'. In Christ 'are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' since in Him 'the whole fulness of the deity [Godhead] dwells bodily'. So that when our lives are 'hid with Christ in God', they are 'filled full in him' for 'in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell'.

This is what we mean by saying: He is the Covenant Head, and He is the Covenant itself. Covenant is really the whole of God, but the whole of God comes to us in the Person of Jesus Christ, His Son.

Section 5

Chapters 22–27

THE CULMINATION OF COVENANT

In our final chapters, we come to what has been called 'the end of the beginning'. What we saw in our first nine chapters was 'the beginning of the end'. All in Creation was protological of all in history, especially of the climactic end which we call 'the *telos*' or the goal and fulfilment of what has happened in history, for this was the ultimate intention of God. In this sense, history has been a long, long haul. At the same time it has never been senseless or without point, a fact which many of humankind have failed to grasp.

In Genesis chapter 3 we read of the Fall of the primal couple, and the changed situation in which, henceforth, they were to live. We also saw that the serpent who had tempted them was told that the Seed of Woman was to be at enmity with the seed of the serpent. One day that Seed of Woman would crush the head of the serpent, albeit He, the Seed of Woman, would suffer as the Bruiser of the serpent. The thread of this teaching, which is found throughout Scripture, is no longer a thread but becomes a startling revelation of the serpent's ultimate destruction.

The dynamic elements of the image of God in Man, of Man in the image of God, now come to their fullness as history draws to its close. These elements are fulfilled in Christ, the true image of God. So we see redeemed humanity come into the fullness of Vocation, becoming a 'kingdom of priests unto God'. Likewise, the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb incorporates all the Community of Faith, the Family or Household of God. The Sabbath Rest of God is found in the inner Sanctuary of God and the Lamb, the true Temple of the Holy City.

So the thrilling story of history, as God had planned it before time, comes to its glorious climax and fulfilment. The end was always in sight from the beginning. Now the beginning has come to its fulfilment which in time we call 'the end'. Even so, it is not the end, but the beginning of all that lies within the marvellous life of the Bride and the Triune God, into Whom she is at last inducted and incorporated.

This, then, is the meaning of God's Covenant.

CHAPTER 22

GOD'S COVENANT CULMINATES—THE END OF THE BEGINNING

The Protological Demands the Eschatological

A simpler way of saying what we mean is 'The beginning demands the end'. It is Paul who gave us a key to the mystery of God, that is, all that God has done in Creation from beginning to end.¹ In Ephesians 5:31–33 he states:

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In this passage Paul is saying that Genesis 2:24 refers primarily to Christ and His Bride. In other words the material contained in Genesis 2:24 is prophetic and

¹ The 'mystery of God' is the secret of God in all that He is as disclosed in the Scriptures. This secret is stated plainly enough, but since 'the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit', then the secret remains undisclosed to that person. The spiritual man receives the things of the Spirit for the Spirit searches the depths of God and discloses them to the spiritual man, accordingly as God wills.

typological of the union of Christ and His Church. Paul acknowledges this is a mystery that is a secret which is only opened to the spiritual man.² The passage does not mean there was no application to the first couple, for there was. It was the ontological principle in which they operated—a man leaving his parents and cleaving to his wife so that the two became, and become, one flesh. We have seen in Romans 5 and I Corinthians 15 that Adam was a type—typological and protological—of the one ‘who is to come’, that is Christ. He, Christ, was the second Adam or the last Adam and if the excursus in our last chapter is correct then Christ was the ‘life-giving spirit’ Who was the opposite to the death-dealing Adam.

In this sense, then, we can say Adam was a prototype of Christ, Eve a prototype of the Church and all things pertaining to the Creation were prototypical of the eschatological ‘new heaven and a new earth’. This being so, we would see Adam as the historical head of the Covenant of God, but Christ the true Head. Similarly, we would see Eve as the prototype of the heavenly Bride, and so of all related eschatological things, namely the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. Eden would also be typical of the paradise to come in which would be the river of life and the tree of life. The beginning thus gives sense to the end, whilst the end alone can give full meaning to the beginning.

Christ the True Image

If we examine primal Man as made in the image of God and then compare Jesus with him, we can now understand Christ to be the true image. We said that all

human relations were innate in the action of God as He created Man in His image. On the Divine level of the Triune God perfection of relationships existed—and exist—between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The rich doctrine of *perichoresis*³ confirms this, namely that the Three Persons coinhere one another because the Father as love is the source of love (*fons divinitatis*) whilst the Son is eternally generated from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. Thus the Son is ‘the Son of his love’, and the Spirit, being the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, is ‘the Spirit of love’. Thus the relations within the Triune Godhead are perfect.

Created Man as the true image of God, and living on the human level, was utterly one with God in communion, and as such had proper relationships with God, with his fellow humans and with all Creation. When we apply the test of these three elements to Jesus He fits them perfectly and so is the true image of God. Likewise when we apply the test of three more, though different, elements—which we saw, formerly, to be the actions of created Man as the image of God—then Jesus also fits them perfectly, namely:

- (i) fulfilling the vocational Mandate of Genesis 1:27ff.;
- (ii) living in the Sabbath Rest of God; and
- (iii) partaking of the union of Marriage.

³ This is the doctrine of the Three Persons interpenetrating one another, and the circularity of the flow of their gifts from their differentiations being constant. That is, the Godhead being love. They give and receive from one another, honour one another and serve one another continually. Man was created in the likeness of this unity, this oneness, and so Man is caught up into the perichoretic flow of the Godhead. Thus his human relationships derive from the Divine.

² For the whole principle of this mystery see I Corinthians 2:5–14.

These elements, which created Man was called to fulfil, Jesus in His life certainly fulfilled.⁴

Christ, God's True Image in History

If our reasoning above be correct, namely that Jesus fulfilled all the criteria that obtained for Man as created in God's image, then we have some other points to consider. The first is that Jesus as the true image of God can help us to understand the nature of Man as created in God's image. Our view of this image has been marred by the fact that we fell in Adam, and cannot fully understand the perfection of the first Adam in his unfallen state. As we regard Christ through the gospel and the Spirit we see what Man can be when truly submitted to God. In Jesus there was no sin and guile, but all that He was and did, as a human being, truly reflected God. Indeed it radiated Him. If then, we thoughtfully ponder the New Testament Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, we can see the full picture emerging of Him as the true image of God.⁵

⁴ It might be objected that Jesus was not 'in marriage', that is, He did not partake of marriage. In fact His life and ministry was related to the Marriage the Father had designed for Him. Ephesians 5:25-26 shows that Jesus gave Himself up for His Bride, the Church. This beloved Spouse was never out of His mind. For an elaboration of these ideas see my *The Profound Mystery*, op. cit.

⁵ A good example of this principle is seen in Ephesians 4:17-32 where Paul contrasts the readers' previous fallen state as Gentiles, and the change that has come as they have learned Christ, 'as the truth is in Jesus'. Having put off the old humanity (Adam's) and put on the new humanity (Christ's) their whole ethical way of life changed. Being 'in Christ', that is in the true image of God, they now show the lineaments of the Man before he fell, as also the elements of Christ in Whom all the fullness of Godhead dwelt. Created Man as or *in* the image of God was one with God and reflected Him. Jesus as the true image radiated God.

The second point we consider is the success of Jesus as the image of God over and against fallen Man's failure. Man was commissioned to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. In the Fall he did not have this Mandate rescinded but he was—and is—unable outside of Christ to be a conqueror. Jesus, as the image of God, proved Himself to be the conqueror of sin, Satan, the world system and its ruling powers, of the lethal domination of the Law, the wrath of God, the legal condemnation of conscience, the power of idols, and the doom of death. In the apocalyptic passages of the Gospels, Epistles and the Revelation, Christ is certainly the image of God in that He is the Conquering King. Beginning with His earthly ministry, proceeding through the acts of the Cross, Resurrection, Ascension and Session at God's right hand, He overcomes all His enemies, the last being that of death, after which He hands the Kingdom to the Father that 'God may be all in all'. This image then, is a dynamic one not only for the ethics which issue from love, but also for the conquest of all evil powers. In looking at these things we must remember that redeemed Man is in Christ, and so in His image, and thus redeemed Man derives all powers and conquests whilst living and acting within that image—the image which Christ is.

The third point we have to consider is the carrying out of God's Mandate as we see it in Genesis 1:28ff., and the Mandate to preach the gospel in all the world, to all the nations, as Christ commanded. The fulfilment of this Mandate must mean the completion of God's will. This is the victory forecast in Genesis 3:15 of the defeat of all

evil by the Seed of the Woman, and the culmination of the Covenant of God by the fulfilling of the two sets of three elements we saw to be innate to Man as the image of God. We have seen, above, that whereas Man at the Fall damaged these two sets of three elements, yet Christ fulfilled them. What we will now see is that Christ Himself is the *eschaton*, the Goal, and the fulfiller of the goal.

Christ, the Image of God, the True Fulfiller of 'the Mystery of His Will'

We have spoken of 'the mystery of God' as being who God is, what He is about, and what is His goal for history. In Ephesians 1:9–10 Paul states:

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.⁶

Something of the same nature is set forth in Colossians 1:19–20: 'For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross'. Linked with the idea of Christ summing up all things (Ephesians 1:10) and reconciling all things (Colossians 1:19–20) was Christ's

⁶ The verb 'to unite' here has the meanings of 'uniting', 'summing up', 'heading up', and is really a synonym for 'reconciling' even though the ideas are somewhat different. In Colossians 3:14 Paul sets forth the principle of the uniting and reconciling action, namely love. He says, 'And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony'.

filling up all things as set out in Ephesians 4:10: 'He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things'. These 'all things' are spoken of as being created by Christ (Colossians 1:15–17) but also of having been subjected to futility —'emptiness'— 'by the will of him who subjected it [the creation] in hope' (Romans 8:20).

So then, 'to unite', 'sum up', 'head up', 'reconcile' and 'fill all things' are terms which speak of God's renewing and climactic work in Christ, namely, the fulfilling of 'the mystery of his will', 'the counsel of his will', 'the mystery of Christ', 'the plan of the mystery', 'the eternal purpose which he [God] has realised in Christ Jesus', 'the glory of this mystery', 'the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages' and 'the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets'.⁷

Whatever God asked of Man in the vocational Mandate this was certainly what he never succeeded in doing, nor could he succeed. This kind of fulfilling of the eschatological Mandate awaited Christ, the radiating glory of God. That the Man-in-Christ may ultimately overcome is clear from Revelation 21:7: 'He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son'. Christ is the true Son 'whom he has appointed heir of all things' and He is the Conqueror, but in Him we, too, 'are more than conquerors'.

How all these things shall work out in the Covenant Head we shall see in the next chapter.

⁷ See Ephesians 1:9; 1:11; 3:4, 9, 11; Colossians 1:27; Romans 16:25; Revelation 10:7.

CHAPTER 23

**GOD'S COVENANT
CULMINATES BY THE
WOMAN'S SEED**

**Christ—the Holy Seed of Woman Concluding
the Covenant**

We saw in Genesis 3:15 that the Seed of Woman was to be set against the serpent's seed.¹ The 'seed of woman' is Christ, and in Revelation 12:1–6 the Woman and her offspring are referred to apocalyptically in connection with the 'great red dragon' who is nominated as 'the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'. The Seed born to the Woman is called, literally, 'a male son'

¹ What 'seed' does the serpent have? It could be 'the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition' (cf. II Thessalonians 2:3), or 'the beast' of Revelation 13:1ff. who is strikingly similar to the red dragon who is 'that ancient serpent the Devil and Satan'. The reference to Satan's seed could mean, as in II Thessalonians 2:3, an actual human person who has come under Satan's control, a sort of counterpart to Immanuel—God manifest in the flesh. The 'man' of Isaiah 14 and of Ezekiel 28 may refer respectively to the king of Babylon and the king of Tyre, or it may refer more broadly to the principle of Satan or to those who are 'the children of the Devil'. Strict interpretation is not called for. In general, the principle of Satanic pride is seen in these two chapters. God has 'the woman and her seed' as a corporate human body of 'the people of God' or 'the children of God', and in particular Jesus, the Seed of Mary. We may draw a Satan parallel from this matter of seed.

(Revelation 12:5). This is the 'one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron', a reference to Psalm 2:6–9 of the Messiah-Son-King. We must note here the widest perspective of the nations, because all nations are under the Covenant of God. God is always concerned with the nations, however, His grace and judgements are concerned intimately with persons. The prophets had, from time to time, uttered God's burdens or oracles to the nations.² The nations were never allowed to go their own way without reminders of God's sovereignty over them, along with His judgements and even certain promises of blessing. In the Book of the Revelation Christ is 'King of kings and Lord of lords' and this means He triumphs over the nations that rage against the Lord and His Anointed (Psalm 2:12). The 'ten kings' of Revelation 17 (cf. Daniel 7:24) may well be the ten diadems on the head of the beast, but in any case they represent the nations over whom God and His Christ are King.

Another way of saying this is that the cursings and the blessings of God, which must result from the way the peoples of the earth had related to or rejected the Covenant of God,³ are completed. In Revelation the

² See, for example, the burdens or oracles against Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt and Tyre in Isaiah 13–24. These are the nations who have set themselves against Israel and, in effect, against Abraham, and so meet their due punishment in accordance with Genesis 12:1ff. At the end of Isaiah 24 we read that God will 'punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth'. It is in chapter 25 that the nations are delivered from judgement—'the former times of their ignorance'—and the veil that has been spread over the nations will be removed, and resurrection to true life will come.

³ When we say 'the Covenant of God', the creational Covenant, we are also thinking of the Covenants with Abraham, Israel and Jacob, as also the New Covenant.

seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath describe the ways in which the judgements of God come upon the nations, the peoples of the earth. Those judgements even affect the Creation itself.⁴

The Defeat of the Seed of Evil by the Seed of Woman

The apocalyptic passages in the Gospels, the Epistles and the Book of the Revelation show that opposition to the Covenant of God is finally quelled. Whilst on the one hand Satan and his forces of evil seem to have the uppermost hand in history yet the final denouement shows this not to be the case. The red dragon and his clone, the beast, as also the second beast or false prophet, all terrify the nations. The kings of the earth are impressed by the beast and join with him in his opposition to the people of God. The 'great harlot', the impressive Babylonian system, is one with the beast in that she rides upon him. She is one with him in persecuting and destroying the saints. John is told, 'The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues' (Revelation 17:15). The beast has arisen from this sea, as

⁴ Isaiah 24 is significant in that it shows the relationship between human sin and the condition of the Creation. When Man is sinful the Creation takes on a sorrowful and suffering aspect. It is to do with this that Paul speaks in Romans 8:17-25: 'the sufferings of this present time', both in Man and the Creation, are somehow essential to the final outcome of the glorification of Man and the Creation in their deliverance into 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. We must not look on the judgements as unessential, any more than we should miss the giving of spiritual blessings to all the people of God, as in Ephesians 1:3-14.

the second beast has risen from the earth, 'the kingdoms of this world'.

The seeming triumph of these evil forces is ephemeral. In one day Babylon is destroyed and the saints slain by her are avenged. This filthy counterpart to the Holy City is utterly decimated. The Rider on the white horse, Christ, 'judges and makes war'. He defeats the beast and the kings of the earth and the false prophet and casts them into the lake of fire. Likewise, at the appropriate time—the time when Gog and Magog under Satan seek to vanquish the camp of the saints—fire comes down from heaven and consumes the earthly powers who fight God. The devil is cast into the lake of fire.

At this point the great white throne, from which had issued the judgements upon the nations in the seals, trumpets and bowls of wrath, becomes the throne of judgement. All the dead,⁵ great and small, are arraigned before the judgement seat of God, and punishment appropriate to the evil committed will be meted out. Those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire.

⁵ Some see 'the dead' mentioned in Revelation chapter 20 as those who have died without Christ. Those who have shared with Christ in the first resurrection have no need to stand before the throne. Others see this great white throne as also being 'the judgement seat of Christ' (II Corinthians 5:10). To me it would seem that since there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1), those who are alive in Christ do not require a judgement. Of course, the principle of I Corinthians 3:12-15 obtains. Some saints will be saved 'as by fire', that is, the dross of their lives will be consumed. Matthew 25:31ff. is also clear. The nations who have received Christ will enter into the joy of the Lord, and others into eternal perdition. In that sense there is a continuous judgment, the process of which will cease at the ultimate climax.

Righteous Judgement and Punishment

What we need to note is that whilst the judgement for righteous and unrighteous deeds is set before us in Revelation 20:11–15, it should be seen that such deeds are not simply acts of sinful commission and omission—though they are certainly that—but that the evil of evil lies in its refusal to know and love God, and gladly to do His will. Judgement is personal. That is, the Father has given the Son authority to judge, to be the Judge.⁶ Revelation 20:11–15 should be understood in the light of Matthew 25:31–46. The central figure in this passage is Christ. All the nations are judged by their attitudes and actions towards Him. He is called both 'Lord' and 'King'. From the perspective that we have been speaking He is Head of the Covenant of God. The attitude and actions of the nations towards Abraham, Israel and the Davidic King determine their cursings and blessings. So also does the same attitude towards this 'Son of man'⁷ Who sits on His glorious throne. 'Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:40), is this Judge's criterion of judgement, whether for the good or for the evil amongst the nations.

As we have said before and now reiterate, all who have violated the Covenant of God in Adam by their unrighteous deeds, must suffer God's judgements in history

⁶ That Christ has been appointed to be Judge is clear from John 5:21–29; Acts 10:42; 17:30–31; II Corinthians 5:10.

⁷ Jesus describes Himself in Matthew 25:31–46 as 'the Son of man'. This title surely issues from Daniel 7:13 and context, where the Son of Man is given dominion over the nations, and with dominion, judgement. Incidentally, the 'ten kings' are mentioned here as they are in the Book of the Revelation. Their fate in Daniel is no less than in the Revelation.

and finally face the great white throne. This, then, is the triumph of the Seed of the Woman, the victory of Christ Himself. The despite done to God's Covenant is finally judged and the judgement is executed. This, then, is true theodicy. This is the true explanation of the presence and conflict of the powers of evil—Satan and his celestial and human forces—and the conflict and victory of Christ and His forces. In the end it is the Head of the Covenant, the Builder of God's House, Who is triumphant. Christ with His Father reigns over all.

God and Man in the Fulfilment of the Covenant of Creation

We have talked about the cursings and the judgements, even to the final judgement. Now it is for us to speak of the blessings of God in His Covenant with all Creation. When Paul said, '[He] has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing⁸ in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 1:5), he was speaking of creational blessings, of the present blessings which come through redemption, and of the ultimate blessings which are coming in the *eschaton* and are completed in the *telos*—the climax of the Covenant. As we have said, all things which were created were protological of the eschatological. The beginning demanded the end, and the end is the completing of the beginning, just as the beginning is the beginning of the completion. We have also seen that all

⁸ This can be translated 'with every spiritual blessing' or 'with every kind of spiritual blessing' because in Christ are hidden 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. 'Spiritual blessings' include what we may call 'material blessings'. No blessing can ultimately be abstract.

these things are theocentric: they have their genesis and completion in the will of God, the counsel of God, and constitute 'the mystery of God'. At the same time they are all effected in Christ, and so may be called Christocentric. In this sense they are personal and intimate.

In saying all this we are thinking in terms of Man's original intimacy with God, his communion with the Triune God as he was created in His image. We are thinking of the three elements connected with the image, namely the Mandate which constituted Man's Vocation, the Sabbath Rest of God in which Man was to participate and the Marriage which was to be the special relationship between man and woman, but was at the same time the mystery of God and His Bride, Christ and His Church.⁹ We may now look to seeing the fulfilment of the three elements as described in the overall unity of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER 24

THE CULMINATION OF THE VOCATIONAL MANDATE

The Culmination of the Mandate

We have seen that God, in creating all things, had His plan which has been described as 'the mystery of the plan'. It was to head up all things in Christ, reconciling that which has become separated and divided by the Fall and Man's consequent sins. We saw that created Man was to be a covenant-partner with God or a house-servant in the House which the Son had built as Creator. In the Fall Man denied his Vocation in the Covenant of Creation. Through the incarnation and especially the work of the atonement Christ had created a new humanity. He had given the gift of the atonement to those who would come to Him. They were incorporated in His Body, the Church. Afresh, they undertook to fulfil the Vocation.¹

The creational Mandate was not superseded by Christ's Mandate to His people to preach the gospel in all the world² to every creature and to bring the nations

¹ In all of this we keep in mind the fact that those called 'the people of God' (cf. Hebrews 11:4ff.) and those called 'the children of God' (cf. I John 3:10ff.) were all the time covenant-partners and house-servants. We need also to keep in mind the fact that there has always been 'the natural law' and so humanity has generally kept to the plan God is working out. Deliberate and unswerving rejection of God and His plan are the marks of the essentially reprobate spirits.

² We must keep remembering that Christ died for the sins of the whole world, that He was Bread come down from heaven which was to be life for the world. His flesh was to be given for the whole world. He did not come to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved. He did not want to closet His followers from the world but to send them into the world even as He had been sent into the world. We must keep remembering that the Covenant of God is a covenant for the whole world.

⁹ Here we are not saying that the primal couple understood the 'profound mystery' of these three elements, yet we must not deny that they could have understood them, since they were in communion with God.

to 'the obedience of faith'. In fact, proclamation of the gospel was God's way, in Christ, of bringing about the fulfilment of that creational Mandate. In this sense the two Mandates are the one, for they are both given in regard to God's Covenant. The Church as Christ's Body is involved in Covenant Vocation. Paul says that God 'made him head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that fills all in all' (Ephesians 1:22–23). In Ephesians 4:10 Paul said, 'He who descended [Christ] is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might *fill* all things'. We have seen that to *fill* all things is the same as to *unify* or *summate* all things as also to *reconcile* all things. So the Church has been given Christ's fullness (*pleroma*) which is there to consummate God's plans. That is why Paul can speak of the Church as 'God's fellow workers'.

The Church, then, is at work, in Christ and by His Spirit, to bring about 'the obedience of faith...among all the nations' (Romans 1:5). It is involved in proclamation of the gospel, and in building up the work of God. The outcome of all this is the culmination of the Covenant in the things shown us symbolically in the last chapters of Revelation.

In these figures we see the Church as part of the army of Christ, always battling against the evil of Satan and his forces, so that the gates of Hades (Death) cannot prevail against the Rider on the white horse and the armies of heaven which follow Him. On the other side

we see all the people of God as the Bride of Christ who is the Holy City descending out of heaven—the new heaven. This Holy City is of incomparable beauty and purity and her gates are never closed, for into her stream the nations—'the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it...they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations' (Revelation 21:24 and 26).

This means the creational and redemptional Mandates—both being the one—are now fulfilled. To each saint is said personally, 'Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your Lord'. This is what Hebrews calls 'the recompense of the reward' and is what Paul refers to when he speaks of 'the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing' (II Timothy 4:8). Revelation 14:13 promises that the saints' deeds do follow them, whilst 21:7 speaks of the promise that, 'He who conquers shall have this heritage [the new heaven and the new earth], and I will be his God and he shall be my son'.

The Culmination of the Rest

Karl Barth writes on the matter of the Divine Rest on the seventh day:

It is not man who brings the history of creation to an end, nor is it he who ushers in the subsequent history. It is God's rest which is the conclusion of the one and the beginning of the other, i.e., God's free, solemn, and joyful satisfaction with that which has taken place and has been completed as creation, and His invitation for man to rest with Him, i.e., with Him to be satisfied with that which has taken place through Him. The goal of creation, and at

the same time the beginning of all that follows, is the event of God's Sabbath freedom, Sabbath rest and Sabbath joy, in which man, too, has been summoned to participate. It is the event of divine rest in the face of the cosmos completed with the creation of man—a rest which takes precedence over all man's eagerness and zeal to enter upon his task. Man is created to participate in this rest...Everything that precedes is to lead to this supreme point. The connection and sequence of the individual events in the history of creation, and these individual events themselves—each in its own place and manner—all point to the last event, to this positive and yet limiting relation of God's Sabbath rest to the man striding forward to the work for which he is prepared... It leads into a sphere where it cannot be overlooked that whatever may happen the truth of the relationship between God and man will be the divinely instituted covenant of the wholly sufficient and wholly sovereign grace of God.³

Similarly, William Dumbrell quotes Westermann who says:

What is peculiar to the holy day in the course of every day happenings is that it points to the goal of the creature which God has created in his image. The work which has been laid on man is not his goal. His goal is the eternal rest which has been suggested by the rest of the seventh day.⁴

In chapter seven we noted that the Sabbath Rest was a sign of the Covenant of God. Exodus 31:17 seems to speak of both a creational and a covenantal sign with Israel. In Exodus 20:11 it is said, as in Genesis 2:3, that

God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it. Man's resting on this day was to be his sharing in this element of the nature of God. Later, for Israel, it was nominated precisely as this, and a sign of the redemption God had wrought for Israel in bringing it out of the land of seven days a week slavery. The verb *sabat* means 'to cease' or 'to rest'.⁵

In the Genesis account it seems that Man was created outside of Eden and then placed in it: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it'.⁶ In life, in the world, and in history, Man was to work out the Mandate but he was to do it in the Rest of God. Eden was the protological paradise. It was the place of peace and joy and love. It was also the place of worship. Service—the outworking of the Mandate—is at the same time worship. Eden was the Sanctuary of God, the place of work and worship since service is worship and worship is service, especially when the offerer does all in the spirit of Rest. We have also seen that having cast Man out of Eden, God was nevertheless present to all humanity. He was especially present wherever there was the Sanctuary. Where Cain and Abel offered their sacrifices He was present, but Cain profaned the altar by his offering, whilst Abel's offering was sanctified by the altar.

This is the history of Man. Wherever he offered in faith there was the altar and so the true Presence of God. Thus many cairns were erected, many memorials—those places which were genuine Sanctuaries. In them there was Rest for the faithful. In Israel there was the tent of meeting, the tabernacle of testimony—God's testimony of His own Presence. The earthly tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly. As the temple it was the place of God's

³ Barth, op. cit., p. 98.

⁴ Dumbrell, op. cit., p. 35.

⁵ cf. Exodus 16:30; 23:12; 31:17.

⁶ Perhaps we should not make too much of this point.

Presence. In the New Covenant Jesus was Immanuel, 'God with us', walking amongst the people. He was the New Temple in Himself. He alone could offer Rest.⁷ God had offered Israel Rest in Canaan but it never achieved it because of its rebellion. David prophesied of an eternal Rest to come, and the writer of Hebrews also spoke of it.⁸ After Jesus ascended, Christ's people—His Body—became the New Temple, the Temple of the New Covenant. This Temple was throughout the world, never restricted to the temporal Mount Zion, but had become for the world the true heavenly Mount Zion to which the world was to flow. Isaiah 2:1–3 says:

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

To which Isaiah 25:6–9 adds:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all

⁷ As we have seen, His invitation in Matthew 11:28–30 was to come to Him for Rest. The 'wicked are like the restless sea', casting up 'mire and dirt', but Jesus can give peace through 'the blood of his cross'. He is the great High Priest in the true Sanctuary of God. He is the 'minister in the Sanctuary'.

⁸ In Hebrews 3 and 4 the writer speaks of a Rest which is undoubtedly the Rest of heaven. The true Rest will come in the true Sanctuary.

peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation".

Finally we come to the culmination of the Temple, the place of Rest, but it is marvellously one with Mount Zion, the Holy City, the place where God dwells with His people. Thus John the Seer describes it to us:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away".⁹

The eternal Holy Zion has been prepared for the culmination of the Covenant of God. The place of worship is the place of Rest and it comes down out of heaven to the earth, and it is the Holy City as it is also the Bride of the Lamb. John tells us more, incredibly more. In Revelation 21:22–27 he says:

⁹ Revelation 21:1–4.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

To say, 'And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb', is to say that God Himself is the Temple, and His people are one with Him for they too, were—and now are—the Temple. This unspeakable holy communion and holy intimacy is the ultimate place of Rest. This is Sabbath Rest of God come to full fruition. This—Rest-wise—is the culmination of the Covenant of God. That is what history has all been about. To be part of the Holy City and to live in it—this is Sabbath Rest which God ordained *for* His people, and *unto* which He ordained them.

CHAPTER 25

THE CULMINATION OF THE MARRIAGE

Marriage: the Third Element of the Image of God and His Covenant Intention¹

In our previous chapter we saw that God's vocational Mandate for Man was at once part of the outworking of the Covenant of God, and of Man being active as the image of God. The Sabbath Rest of God is also the outworking of the Covenant, and Man's resting is the activity of his being in God's image. We come to our third element—that of Marriage—and we see here again, that it is the outworking of the Covenant of God, and is the action of Man as the image of God. That is, the three elements are covenantal and constitute Man as the active image of God. What is both interesting and significant is that both God and Man are involved in these three things—Vocation, Rest and Marriage. We can say that in God these elements are *archetypal*, and in Man they are *ectypal*. God is the living Pattern from which the human copies of Vocation, Rest and Marriage are made.² Our point in repeating what has been said in

¹ It would be greatly helpful for us to refresh ourselves by re-reading chapters 8 and 9 of this present book. It would also be a help to read my book *The Profound Mystery*, op. cit.

² In chapters 8 and 9 we dealt with the whole matter of Marriage, not only at the time of Creation, but throughout history. We saw that Bromiley, as quoted in chapter 9, made the point, 'Earthly marriage is now lived out as a bad copy of a good original'. Before the Fall, human marriage was a good copy of the original.

previous chapters regarding Vocation, Sabbath Rest and Marriage, is that these three Divine elements are earthed in our humanity. They are part of our everyday, human existence.

We now have to observe that Marriage—as also Vocation and Rest—are never seen or experienced now as perfect. They were perfect prior to the Fall, and will be this in the consummation of the world in the new heavens and the new earth. But for the present we have to live with the imperfections. When Man as the image of God is glorified, he will shine perfectly.

Human Marriage of Great Importance

We saw previously that Paul, in referring to Genesis 2:24, spoke of marriage as 'a profound mystery'. By this he meant that Genesis 2:24 was referring primarily to the Marriage between Christ and His Church, and only secondarily to the primal couple and all couples following them. In this sense we may say that the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb—Christ and the Church—is the *archetype* of which marriages are *ectypes*.³

This means we must read both Old and New Testaments most carefully or we will miss the importance of human marriage in its relation to the Divine-human Marriage of God the Husband of Israel, His Wife, and

Christ the Husband of the Church, His Wife. It will be helpful, here, to quote Karl Barth commenting on Marriage from the second account of Creation in Genesis 2:18–25:

It does, of course, point to the divine basis of love and marriage as the due fulfilment of the male-female relationship. But as this whole second account of creation, without prejudice to the concreteness of its statements in their direct sense, is permeated by the reference to God's gracious covenant with Israel as the internal basis of creation itself, the same is true of its conclusion. Beyond its direct statements it envisages the most important Old Testament relationship in which Yahweh is represented as the faithful Lover, Bridegroom and Husband of this people, and the latter as the equally unfaithful beloved, bride and wife. It also envisages the perfect form of this relationship to be brought about by Yahweh, an imminent betrothal between Yahweh and Israel "in righteousness, and in judgement, and in loving-kindness and in mercies" (Hosea 2:19), in which the faithfulness will not be one-sided, but mutual. To be more precise, Genesis 2:24 regards the male-female relationship in the light of this great theme running through the whole of the Old Testament. Therefore when a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, becoming one flesh with her, this takes place because God in His election of Israel and covenant with it has bound Himself so recklessly with this people, making Himself one with it so unreservedly and with such promise...And it should now be clear that if we take into account this equation and therefore this fulfilment of Genesis 2:24 and the rest of the Old Testament history of promise we are inevitably led to a different evaluation of the relation between man and woman.⁴

³ At this point we observe that the more a human marriage is 'in Christ' then the richer it will be, and the better copy it will be of the original.

⁴ Barth, op. cit., pp. 142–143.

We thus see that human marriage is not an analogue or figure of the Divine-human Marriage but that human marriage derives from the Divine-human Marriage which is consummated at the end-time, as set out in Revelation 19:6–9 and 21:1–27.

We need then to look briefly at human marriage in the Old Testament and the Marriage bond of God and Israel. Then we will also look briefly at Christ's and Paul's approach to this matter. The understanding of marriage we will get, will help us to appreciate the ultimate Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb as the consummation of God's Covenant. It will also help us to enrich our own marriages.

The Divine-Human Marriage in the Old Testament: God and His Love, Israel, in Her Tender, Youthful Love

As in Jeremiah 2:2, God says to Israel, 'I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord', and so, it seems that Israel was a devoted Wife. In Ezekiel 16:8–14 there is a moving passage which describes how God Who had saved the baby girl from perishing, now prepares her for Marriage. He says, 'I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine'. There follows the description of her beautification for her nuptials, closing with, 'And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendour which I had bestowed upon you'. The outcome of the Marriage is disastrous. Israel becomes idolatrous and

adulterous. Even so, God will not give Israel up. He will retain the Marriage. Certainly He will judge Israel, but in the end she will know His forgiveness. Even in that judgement, the incredible marital love of the Divine Husband can be seen in Ezekiel 16:59–62:

Yea, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD.

It does not seem out of place to indicate here that for persistence in love with an adulterous spouse, God the True Husband is the paradigm. He is also the *archetype* for the human *ectype*. The provision in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 for divorcing a spouse of 'indecency' seems to pale in the light of such Marriage-*agape*. Forgiveness within the marriage banishes the matter of divorce. God will never divorce Israel, so spouses in a marriage likewise must not divorce. 'I hate divorce', God says.⁵

⁵ Much of this material is derived from my book *The Profound Mystery*, op. cit., pp. 70–76.

The Covenant of God and the Covenant of Marriage

The truth of marriage is called a covenant in Proverbs 2:16–17 where the writer speaks of the promiscuous woman who ‘forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God’.⁶ Likewise in Malachi 2:14 the prophet says, ‘...Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant’. So it is that the first prophet to show, under the figure of marriage, the faithfulness of God in the midst of Israel’s unfaithfulness as a Wife, was Hosea, in the 8th century B.C. It is Hosea’s theme that is reflected in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and even Malachi. Hosea’s lover has been, or becomes, a prostitute.⁷ Her children are not fathered by the prophet. In the figure, God the Husband of Israel hates the children, for they are not His own. Even so God will not abandon her. Whilst she has lived in promiscuity and wrongly attributes her ‘good things’ to the Baals, God will so hedge her around that she will ultimately be shut up to her first Husband, ‘Then

she will say, “I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now”. God will denude her of all things, bring her to shame and desolation. Having done that, God will have, as it were, a new day of wooing and betrothal.

Not only will Israel be His newly wooed and betrothed Bride, but her children will be accepted and made the very children of God. What needs to be grasped is that God views His Marriage with Israel seriously. It must be ‘Holy Marriage’, conforming with the revelation of the man-woman ‘one-flesh’ union of Genesis 2:24 and the revelation through the ‘Ten Words’.⁸ These confirm the holiness of marital love and the family it brings into being.⁹ When there is infidelity such as Israel shows, there must be judgement. That judgement must bring repentance, and when repentance comes then, and only then, restoration can be truly effected.

The Divine-Human Marriage in the New Testament

(I) THE VIEWS OF JESUS AND PAUL

As to Christ’s own view of marriage it can well be argued from His statements of Matthew 5:32; 19:1–12; Mark 10:1–12; and Luke 16:18 that He rejected both

⁶ J. Baab, in his article ‘Marriage’ in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, Abingdon Press, New York, 1962, p. 284, says, ‘In the Bible marriage is regarded as a covenant entered into by two families who thereby form an alliance through their representatives, the bridegroom and the bride. So marriage is both personal and communal. Our justification for using the word “covenant” derives in part from the use by biblical writers of the figure of marriage to describe the covenant relation between Yahweh and Israel, and in part from the place of the covenant in social contracts of the biblical community’.

⁷ Whether she was this before or after marriage is not quite clear from the text.

⁸ That is, the holy Law of God’s own being is revealed at Sinai both by God’s direct speaking ‘the Ten Words’ and by His giving them as ‘hard copy’—as written on the two tablets.

⁹ Note in Jeremiah 31:31–34 that God claims that at Sinai He was Husband to Israel. Some see Sinai as a Marriage, and the feast with God of the seventy elders on Sinai to be a Marriage feast, protological of ‘the marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb’.

divorce and remarriage. Certainly the use of the anti-thesis in Matthew 5:31–32 radicalises the law and restores its pristine nature in regard to marriage. In the light of the Old Testament prophets we have studied above, Christ could never have envisaged marriage as other than inviolable.¹⁰

Paul's view, most would argue, was the same as that of Jesus, and what we must keep in mind was Paul's background thinking of 'the profound mystery'. For example, one has to read I Corinthians 7 in the light of Ephesians 5:21–33.

When it comes to the New Covenant, William Dumbrell, speaking on Jeremiah 31:31–34 comments:

The indivisibility, however, of the covenant from the divine point of view is referred to in v. 32 by its depiction in marriage terms. Yahweh has been a 'husband to them'. The use of this marriage imagery, so extensive in Jeremiah as a figure for Israel's apostasy, ought to be carefully noted in this New Covenant section. It is saying that by its very nature the covenant arrangement could not be sundered. Divorce on the divine side could never be contemplated. Within the human situation in the Old Testament divorce within the marriage relationship was possible, since the hardness of the human heart necessitated that (cf. Deuteronomy 24:1–4)...In short the element which will characterise the New Testament, and thus render it 'new' will be its irrefragability.¹¹

Dumbrell's reasoning fortifies the New Testament emphasis on what he calls *the irrefragability* of marriage,

¹⁰ See *The Profound Mystery*, op. cit., pp. 77–83, for a fuller picture of Christ's view of marriage. Also see its bibliography for a more extensive reference.

¹¹ Dumbrell, op. cit., pp. 177–178.

that is, *the indestructible nature* of the covenant union. Seeing this is the emphasis both of the Old and New Testaments, we can now look at the purpose and intention of God to bring the Divine-human Marriage to fulfilment.¹²

(II) REFERENCES TO CHRIST AS BRIDEGROOM IN THE GOSPELS

John the Baptist referred to Christ as the Bridegroom and himself as 'the friend of the bridegroom' (John 3:28–30). In Matthew 9:15 (cf. Mark 2:19) Jesus certainly referred to Himself—even if only figuratively—as the Bridegroom Who was present. The rejoicing of Matthew's friend at the feast was likened to a marriage celebration. Two parables of the Kingdom are used in Matthew 22:1–14 and 25:1–13. The first is almost fierce in its insistence that guests come and when they come that they appropriately present themselves. The father-king gives a marriage feast for his son. His 'Everything is ready' is echoed in Revelation 19:6–10 where 'his Bride has made herself ready' and 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb'. Without elaborating, the Matthew 22 parable tells of the Father preparing the Bride, and it appears that the Messianic feast Jesus speaks of is one with the Wedding feast.¹³ The Matthew 25 story of the wise and foolish

¹² I can think of no better 'spouse mysticism' than that which Jonathan Edwards put forward, and at which we looked in chapter 9. Yet it is even clearer in a sermon preached by Jonathan Edwards entitled, 'Sermon II: The Church's marriage to her sons and to her God'. It is found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, which was first published in 1834 and reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, in 1974.

¹³ The explanation here is perhaps a little too complicated for us to undertake in this treatment. We need to view all references to the wedding feasts and the Messianic victory feast. They seem to be the one.

virgins again needs no elaboration. It is eschatological with the warning of preparing for the joy.

(III) THE TRIUNE GOD: WORKING TOWARDS THE WEDDING FEAST AND ITS OUTCOME

If the parables speak of the Father's work for His Son, then in John's Gospel (6:46; 6:65; cf. Matthew 11:25–27) it is the Father Who reveals His Son and draws men and women (the Church, the Bride) to Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Revelator of both Father and Son (John 16:12–15), and He brings the saving gospel to the elect people of God, the true Bride. Through the power of the Cross the same Spirit sanctifies the Bride (cf. II Thessalonians 2:13–14; I Peter 1:2; I Corinthians 6:11), but then it is Christ Who is called the Saviour of the Bride (Ephesians 5:25; cf. I John 4:14). In whatever condition He finds her¹⁴ He gives Himself for her and so works that He sanctifies her, 'having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word'. She is made splendid ('glorious': cf. Revelation 21:11ff.) and fit for her Spouse. In the metonymy of Ephesians 5:21–33 the spouse has reverence for her husband, and fear which is at the same time respect, obviously for what he has done for her. Bit by bit we are being admitted into the ontology of Marriage, into a relational *praxis* that is so valuable for *paranetics* and pastoral help.¹⁵

To continue: it is God the Father in Revelation 19 and 21 Who prepares the ultimate Marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb. The Warrior Bridegroom returns from His victory over all evil powers to usher His Bride into the fit home He has been preparing for her (cf. John 14:1–10). But then the Bride must go through certain preparatory rituals:¹⁶ 'make herself ready', 'be clothed with fine linen, pure and bright', 'be prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' so that she now has 'the glory of God'. In all this the Holy Spirit has been working as one with her until the point when 'The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come"', and all the elect hearing this also say 'Come', for that has been the Church's cry through the preparatory ages, 'Maranatha: Lord, come'. It seems God's design to admit the Church into the Divine Family as His Son's Wife is now to take place. Had the Son not become incarnate He could not have had a human Bride, and He could not have conducted her to the Godhead, and so inducted her into the mystery of that same Godhead. Now humanity is joined to marvellous Deity and the plan for history has reached its *telos*.

The Culmination of the Covenant in Marriage

The Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb culminates all Marriage throughout all time. Man as the Bride-Wife

¹⁴ Do we here think of God as Husband to Israel and of Hosea's prophecy and that of Ezekiel 16 and 23 in regard to the Church?

¹⁵ The term *paranetics* is intended to cover *the ethical conduct demanded of believers*. Members of the New Covenant are exhorted to fulfil these precepts and principles.

¹⁶ These rituals are seen in the Old Testament, especially in the *Book of Esther* and in *The Song of Songs*, but they happen in all thoughtful contemporary wedding preparations.

of God is ultimately taken into the Godhead through the Son Who has become Man in order to wed Himself to the Bride. Thus the Marriage Supper of the Bride and the Lamb has been the holy intention of God from the beginning. Human marriage which was at once ontological, typological, protological and so eschatological is the situation into which humankind comes at the end. All eternity is the bliss and fruitfulness of the Holy Couple, the induction of humanity into the inner fellowship of the Triune Family. In this way the Father's plan for His Son, His 'daughter-in-law' and His Eternal Family comes to its fulfilment.

CHAPTER 26

GOD'S COVENANT AND CREATION

The One Covenant for the Wide World

In the New Testament we find an opening out of covenant to the wide world. This is how it ought to have been, for the Covenant of God was with all Creation. We saw in Jeremiah 33:19–26 that God has made His Covenant 'with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth'. In this context also we saw that God stated firmly His intention to fulfil His Covenant with David—one we know to involve the Messiah King's rule over all the earth. Again, in this context, there is reference back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and we know the Covenant with them involved all nations, as Genesis 12:1–3 well shows. In Genesis 9 we see that the Covenant of Creation is renewed, established and confirmed, for:

This is the sign of the covenant which I make [establish] between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations...When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

In Creation Is an Irreversible Covenant for the Whole World

We have seen that the Covenant of God was with all the Creation by virtue of His act of creating all things. God, within Himself, is Covenant—the inner relationships of the Trinity being of the nature of unity, communion and love. In this sense there was no need to talk explicitly of a covenant, and Genesis 8:21–22 and 9:9 tell us that God confirms or establishes what was innate to Creation. In the light of all this we saw the dreadful violation of God's gift and His nature by reason of the Fall. Man was rejecting God as his natural habitat, his true home. He was rejecting the true Presence in his life. Absolute freedom from the Creator seemed to him to be a heady thing, when in fact it was fearful bondage. Man violated the Covenant, breaching it in order to be 'like God knowing good and evil'. But it never turned out that way. In fact, man was caught in the deepest of all bondages—the bondage to sin and self.

The Evil of Covenant-Breaking and Consequent Lawlessness Is Judged

The rapid growth of violence and corruption was certainly linked with the alternate systems primeval Man created. So the flood came as a judgement upon all evil, yet at that very time the Covenant was, so to speak, reiterated. Man had violated the Covenant of God, cutting himself off, but God did not cut Himself off from Man. The making of a Covenant with Abraham, as we have seen, had universal connotation—likewise the Covenant with Israel, and with David. The New Cov-

enant also had a worldwide connotation.

Paul, in Romans 1:18–32, gives us a broad sketch of what happened to Man. In rejecting God, he needed objects of worship to fill his innate need for adoration and service. Hence he invented idols, which gave him some satisfaction, and a place of worship such as shrines and temples. In objectifying God as Man wished God to be, that is, in the form of idols, Man helped to tide himself over difficult periods of human living. But such idolatry could never be satisfying by the nature of the case. In addition there were other forces at work besides God's wrath on Man for his covenant-breaking, namely, the powers of evil. Satan and his system with celestial and earthly powers in his grasp—'the whole world is in the power of the evil one'—made matters infinitely worse. The breaking up of a human monolithic unity by the introduction of tongues at the Tower of Babel further intensified the divisions of culture, race and worship.

The Covenants within the Covenant Are Essentially Universal and Eternal

The Covenant with Abraham, we have seen, was really a continuation of the worldwide Covenant of God. Abraham was called out of the midst of idolatry to know the 'Lord God, Most High, maker of heaven and earth', as he professed Him to Melchizedek. Abraham had a universal view of God and Man, and the writer of the Book of Hebrews picks up this principle. Abraham looked to a city to come, whose builder and maker was God. Abraham was not the first person of faith, for Abel is nominated as such, and following him throughout history there have been such persons of faith, living

under the Covenant of God and sharing with Him in the outworking of His plan.¹ These have known, at least in part, 'the mystery of God'.

We have seen this universal view was innate to the Covenant with Israel, although not all members of that commonwealth saw it as such. The concept of a universal action of God was certainly vastly expanded in the Covenant with David. We saw that in Israel, as it developed to be a nation notable amongst other nations, the sense of local and geographical dimensions gradually changed. Under the prophets, the principles of the holy city of Jerusalem and the holy temple of the city began to move towards a universal symbolism, a richer way of understanding God as King over all the nations, and in His sovereignty dealing with them.

The New Covenant Leads to the End

So far as Israel was concerned the judgements of God had shaped it into a nation in which idolatry had ceased. Outwardly that was certainly so, though Stephen in his speech before the Jewish Sanhedrin² charged them with perpetual and chronic idolatry. The word of direct prophecy from God had ceased for hundreds of years, but prior to the birth of Jesus there was, among some in Israel, great expectation of the coming of Messiah. The prophecies and angelic visitations surrounding the birth of Jesus bring us into a new atmosphere. The attestation at Jesus' baptism by God that this man is the Son of God, sets the scene for Jesus' three years of ministry and the remarkable events that

happened. Jesus teaches the fact of His impending death and indicates its immense significance, especially in regard to its being the New Covenant sealed in His blood. The immense amount of material taught concerning the meaning of His death, resurrection, ascension and the sending forth of the Spirit to bring the Church into being and proclaim the lifegiving gospel is set before us and proclaimed to the world. In all of this the risen and ascended Christ is present as the One Who is ever interceding for His people and for the whole world.

God's Covenant with the World in Christ Jesus His Son

In the final chapters of the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—the commission given to the disciples is to preach the gospel in all the world. It is to teach it not only to every person, but also to all the nations, with a view to bringing them—as nations—to the feet of Christ.³ In these commands we see the gospel is for all the world.⁴

³ The discipling of the nations is clearly set out in Matthew 28:18–20. That it is to all nations is clear from Luke 24:44–49 and Mark 16:15–20. Acts 1:8 also indicates the universal intention of Jesus, namely the gospel being sent to Israel, Samaria and the Gentiles—the other nations.

⁴ Paul saw this so clearly, and perhaps even beyond the understanding of the other apostles, though we have no sure proof to assert this. In Romans 1:5; 15:18–21 and 16:25–26 the apostle to the Gentiles makes it clear that through the gospel God intended to bring all the nations to the feet of Christ. This is borne out in I Corinthians 15:24–28, in the Epistle to the Hebrews where the nations are made the footstool of Christ, and powerfully in The Book of the Revelation, which, in one sense, is a rich commentary on I Corinthians 15:24–28, and which shows all the nations falling under the rod of Christ by the sword which goes forth from His mouth. The fact that Christ is the Judge of all nations means that ultimately their judgement is in the light of the mercy of the gospel and the response or rejection of it by the nations. Certainly a multitude such that no man can number is the number of the redeemed elect.

¹ See Hebrews 11:4ff. and I John 3:10ff.

² See Acts 7 and in particular verses 38–53.

It is this matter—'the gospel is for all the world'— which we now briefly trace in John's Gospel. It is the flavour of Christ's compassion for the world which moves us. A brief survey of Jesus' use of the word 'world' shows clearly how much the thought of the world was in the mind of Jesus. There were various aspects He revealed concerning it, namely that the world was that system opposed to God and so to Him and which would always hate and persecute Him and His followers. At the same time the created world with all its inhabitants was God's world, and He so loved it that He had given His Son to redeem it. In the course of redeeming it Christ was to oppose the worldly system of Satan which had great power within the created world, and to topple it by His death and resurrection.

Jesus' use of the term 'world' (*kosmos*) seems to oscillate between the world of God's Creation and the system of evil which had captured even many of the Jewish leaders. In some cases the world is those Jewish leaders who would destroy Him, and yet Jesus envisages an even wider community, the world which the Holy Spirit will convict of sin, of righteousness and of judgement. It is difficult to define 'the world' in one paragraph, but in a sentence we may say, 'The world is that system of evil headed up by the Devil, in whose power and under whose sway are fallen celestial creatures and those humans who oppose—wittingly or otherwise—the

Covenant of God'. We should understand that the created world—as such—is not meant when John says, 'the whole world is in the power of the evil one'. He is speaking of an evil system which is working within the created world.

Jesus' Mission to and for the World

John records that the Light that lightens every man was coming into the world.⁵ Often Christ spoke of Himself as the Light that was come into the world to lighten it. John attested that Jesus was the Lamb of God come to take away the sin of the world, and the world's judgement was that it refused the Light, choosing rather to love darkness. Whether Jesus or John spoke the words of 3:16–21, the fact is that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but that through Him it might be saved. The Samaritans saw and declared that Jesus was the Saviour of the world. Jesus declared that He was the Bread of Heaven sent down from heaven to give life to the world. Indeed, being that living Bread, He was giving life to the world by giving His flesh for the life of the world—obviously a reference to His saving death.

He reiterated a number of times that He was the Light of the world, an enormous claim to make, for He

⁵ References used above are John 1:9, 10, 29; 3:16, 17, 19; 4:42; 6:14, 33, 51; 8:12, 23, 26; 9:5, 39; 10:36; 11:9, 27; 12:19, 46, 47; 14:27, 30, 31; 15:18, 19; 16:11, 20, 21, 28; 17:6, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 21, 23, 25; 18:36, 37. A glance at a concordance will reveal our Lord's understanding of and approach to the world as the Creation loved by God, the sinful humanity as part of it, and the evil system opposed by Him.

was saying that apart from Him all was darkness. The prince of this world—Satan—was the ruler of darkness. Christ said He had come to unseat this prince and to judge this world. His death on the Cross would cast out this evil ruler, and the coming Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgement. The disciples would suffer from the persecution of the world but they should keep in mind that their Master had overcome the world. In His last prayer, on the night of His betrayal, He prayed that the disciples would be kept from the world into which He was now sending them as, indeed, the Father had sent Him into that same world. He also prayed for such unity between the disciples and those who would believe on Him—Christ—because of the disciples' word, that the world would know God had sent Him into the world. His last word on the world was to tell Pilate that His—Jesus'—Kingdom was not of this world.

The Passion of the Triune God for the World

What we should perceive in all this recorded material of John is that God loves the world. He so loved it as to send His Son into the world to be the Saviour of the world, and Jesus so loved it that He was one with the Father in His intention to save it. So Jesus gave His life in death for the world. As John recorded later, He died, 'not for ours [sins] only but also for the sins of the whole world' (I John 2:2). Great literature has been written about this marvellous love and act of God. Poems and lyrics have been written and songs have been sung about this unspeakable love of God. It is at the climax—so to speak—of human history that we see

God truly as the great Covenant God. This was the spirit the disciples and apostles caught, and they travelled the then known world with their powerful message.

It remains then for those of us, we, who write as I have done in this book, to admit that in our feeble particularising of the Covenant of God—in which lie the Covenants Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New—we live only *at the edge* of this great and wonderful truth. It is not only that the material is beyond human encompassing, and that one's abilities are limited in their power to survey this grand theme of all the Scriptures, but it is that grace baffles us, even whilst it enlightens us.

This much is true: God has shown us that He loves the world which He created. His wrath is on those who would defile and destroy it. His anger is against those who would rule the world to their own benefit and comfort. His grace is for those who have been made aware of His creating and redeeming love, and His high intention to glorify His elect along with the Creation itself.

So we are given the high view of the culminating events of God's history, namely the beautiful Bride of Christ who descends to the earth as the Holy City, which is the pure Spouse of the Father's Son. We see the utter purity of true worship of the Triune God, of God as the Eternal Sanctuary and the place of tranquil Rest. Within this Sanctuary is the river of life and the tree of life whose leaves will have healed all nations. The redeemed world settles at the feet of its Creator-Redeemer and gazes into His face, knowing at last the fullness of Covenant love, knowing that its long history has always been with this glorious goal in mind. No wonder it bursts into rhapsodic adoration for the truth that Man has become one with God. Wedded as the Bride to the Son, that redeemed world is inducted into the mystery

and the fullness of fellowship with God.

No wonder, too, that one theologian has said, 'Ultimately it will all be music, it will be all music'.

Meanwhile, the people of God are filled with anticipation of these glories of which they have been told. There is a constraint on them to tell these things to the whole world. As certain lepers once said, 'This day is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us; *now, therefore come, let us go and tell ...*'⁶ (italics mine).

CHAPTER 27

GOD'S COVENANT AND MAN'S RESPONSE

The Covenant Is Practical

In our last chapter we saw the fulfilment of God's plan in regard to the Creation, namely that He has ever loved what He created, and this includes all human creatures. He has, in addition, shaped things to be the very best when they come to their conclusion in what we call the *telos*, or the end-goal as it is fulfilled. Now we need to see our present place and participation in the matter of covenant, especially the New Covenant.

God's Covenants and the Nations

We have used the plural term 'covenants' whilst we hold in our minds the fact that all the Covenants with which we have dealt are parts or components of the Covenant of God, or, as we have sometimes called it, 'the Covenant of Creation'. Covenant, we saw, was—and is—inherent in Creation. Established afresh with Noah, it meant that the nations which grew from Noah—Shem, Ham and Japheth—were also under this Covenant, firstly by virtue of the Covenant of Creation, and then by the Covenant with Noah. Genesis 10 and 11 cover the developments of the nations. We note that

⁶ 2 Kings 7:9.

each section—Japhetic, Hamitic and Shemitic¹—finishes with the following kind of conclusion; 'These are the sons of Japheth [Ham, Shem] in their lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations'.² We conclude that they are, by the Covenant of God, Covenant peoples.

In Acts 17:22–31 Paul reminds his Athenian hearers of the nature of God and says that this true God 'gives to all men life and breath and everything'. Paul then delivers his understanding of the unity of the human race, 'And he made from one [Adam, man, blood] every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him'. Paul is saying that God has His purpose in setting 'allotted periods' and 'boundaries of their habitation'.

That Paul has something special and significant in mind is shown in his Epistles where he speaks of Christ as being over all the nations, of summing up 'all things', of reconciling 'all things', and shows that through the Cross all nations were brought together, particularly under the categories of (i) Israel and (ii) the Gentiles, that is 'the nations'.³ He also shows that the categories of gender, race, and social position pose a hindrance to this total

¹ Note that in Genesis 10:6–14 the descendants of Ham are nominated, and then in verses 15–20 the Canaanites are spoken of, Canaan being a son of Ham. In 9:27 Canaan seems to stand for Ham, as he is referred to pejoratively. It is obvious that the writer of this chapter wishes to draw attention to the outcome of Ham's irreverent treatment of his father, Noah.

² Genesis 10:32 concludes all three branches of the nations to be the sons of Noah, that is, it represents them as one large family which was spreading across the face of the earth after the flood.

³ Ephesians 1:9–10; 1:21–23; Colossians 1:19–20; Ephesians 2:11–22. Note in Romans 9–11 Paul takes up the question of Israel and the nations coming into Christ's salvation.

unity of the human race.⁴ When these facts are linked with the worldwide commission to the apostles to make disciples of the nations and baptise them into the Triune Name, then the coming together of the nations is seen to be in accordance with the principle of covenant.⁵ John, in the Book of the Revelation, shows Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, depicts the nations as ultimately entering the Holy City and Christ as the One Who smites the nations with the sword of His mouth, so that in being smitten they either respond to Him or come under judgement for refusing to do so.

We can sum up, then, the action of God in history as a winning of the nations in the light of the Covenants we have discussed, namely the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic and New. Since the Davidic King shall 'smite the nations' with the rod of His mouth or the sword of His mouth, then Christ as the Mediator of the New Covenant acts in this cosmic way, with cosmic results.

Christ the King-Priest of All the Nations

It is the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews who expands our view of Christ as the King-Priest 'after the order of Melchizedek'. In terms of Psalms 2 and 110,

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:9–10.

⁵ In all this we are not saying that all the nations, willy-nilly, come to Christ. Matthew 25:31–46 speaks of *nations* being either sheep or goats, and that they will be judged according to these two categories. The Book of the Revelation also speaks of 'the [ten] kings of the nations', which links them with Daniel 7. Judgement will come to the nations, but 'every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'. All will be submitted, perforce because of the conviction of the truth.

Christ not only transcends the old Levitical or Aaronic priesthood, and the more particularistic mediatorship of the Covenant with Israel, but the promises of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34 have universal application. Thus the saving ministry of Christ at the Cross and the intercessory ministry of the ascended Lord are for the nations. In other words, the New Covenant cannot be limited to some future situation which has to do only with Israel. We are now concerned with the universal nature of the New Covenant.

The Response of Man to the Covenant of God

We now come to what we might call the practical response of Man to the Covenant of God. The primal couple knew the Covenant of God and knew it to be unilateral, by nature of the case of Creation, but they refused to acknowledge the *obligation* to obey the God of that Covenant. A contractual covenant cannot be a unilateral covenant.⁶ It is on the basis of this reasoning that we claim all God's Covenants demanded obedience on the basis of obligation. It was obligation which was necessarily upon God's goodness. In the case of Creation it was God's goodness of Creation.⁷ In spite of

⁶ Some theologians argue that because covenants contemporary with Israel were contractual and ones of suzerainty, then the Covenants in Israel must be similar because they would have derived from them. The uniqueness of God's unilateral Covenant is not necessarily controverted by any contemporary custom.

⁷ In Romans 1:18–32 Paul traces the rebellion of Man against the goodness of God as shown in the goodness of Creation. He then outlines the disastrous effects of having repudiated God and His goodness.

Man's evil prior to the flood, God affirmed His Covenant with all Creation following the flood. Abraham is undoubtedly shown to have observed the obligation to obedience within the Covenant, and Israel promised such obedience at the time of 'cutting the Covenant'.⁸ The Davidic Covenant carried with it the obligation to obedience, and the New Covenant also implies obedience from the heart.⁹

The Covenants and the Law of God

Linked with this matter of covenantal, obligatory obedience is the whole matter of the Law of God. The Law was—and is—the Law of God's nature, and hence is the way of life for Man who is made in the image of God. Without doubt the Law is primarily for life, and is the very way of life. Only when it is broken does it appear in the light of condemnation and curse. Noah was a righteous man in his generation and found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He lived according to the creational Covenant of God. Abraham obeyed all God's laws and ordinances and commandments.¹⁰ Israel was set to obey God's commandments because of His deliverance of them from Egypt (cf. Exodus 20:2f.; Deuteronomy 5:6f.). God spoke 'the ten words' to Israel, personally and intimately, and these constituted the Law of God. We have seen that innate to the Davidic

⁸ Genesis 26:4–5; Exodus 24.

⁹ II Samuel 7:14ff.; Jeremiah 31:31–34; cf. Hebrews 8:7–12; 10:16–17; Matthew 26:27–28.

¹⁰ Genesis 26:4–5.

Covenant was the idea that the Covenant was to be 'the charter of the nations' or 'the charter for the nations', that is, it was to be the way of life for the nations. The New Covenant, like other Covenants, evoked the response of obedience to God's Law. Our last chapter has shown that Man as the image of God has, by the grace of God, fulfilled the three elements of the image—Vocation, Sabbath Rest and Marriage—and in this sense has fulfilled 'the just requirement of the law' (*to dikaioma tou nomou*).

True Covenantal Obedience

We have spoken of Covenant-Man as being obedient, out of love in response to the love of God in Covenant, which comes to mean love in Creation, in salvation and in ultimate glorification. Leaving aside the mystery of predestination and the response which comes only from the elect, the very fact that Man responds to God, to the revealed goodness of God in Creation and His grace and mercy in Covenant, can be seen as a matter of commonsense. Given that the mystery of the Godhead and of the gospel is opened to him by revelation of the Word and the Spirit he can surely do nothing else.

The New Testament is filled with the matter of God's holy Law, shown in many paracletics, paranetics and other clear forms of commands and ethical injunctions. These presuppose that the hearers of them are saved and that, in Christ, they have recourse to the power of the Spirit and His gifts. The Book of the Revelation shows that the saints are those who keep the commands of God and bear witness to Jesus. We take this to mean, *in toto*:

- (i) obedience to the Law of God as inherent in Creation;
- (ii) the elements of the image of God being fulfilled in Vocation, Rest and Marriage; and
- (iii) participation in the will of God regarding the proclamation of Christ and the gospel to the nations.

This all is 'keeping the commands of God and bearing witness to Jesus'.

All Response Is to the Triune God

Response is a gift of God, leading to the taking up of responsibility. Again we do not take up the matter of calling and predestination, but it is only in the light of these that we know the people of God will live in the obligatory obedience of love. In the light of the Fatherhood of God, the Lordship of Christ in salvation, in His being Head of the Church, and in His work with the Father amongst the nations we can see that we are empowered to participate in God's will. The power of the Spirit and His revelation of the Father and the Son, as also His unifying power within the Church and Creation, encourage us to continue in the Law and will of God. All this action of God, in which we are invited to take up partnership, is in the context of Covenant. Outside of this there is nothing. In that sense, nothing is unrelated to Covenant. As we have seen, the Father is Covenant-Father, the Son is the King-Priest of the Covenant, and the Spirit is the Spirit of the Covenant. This fact and knowledge make us then, irretrievably the people of the Covenant, the people amongst whom God dwells, and who dwell in the Triune God. Ultimately the

Triune God will be our home and this expectation keeps us
strong in covenant-response and covenant-obedience.

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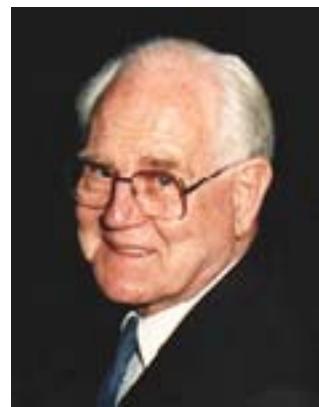
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About the Author

Geoffrey Cyril Bingham was born on 6 January 1919 at Goulburn, NSW. By his early teens Geoffrey was writing poetry and short stories and editing small magazines. Within a few years some of his work was being published.

In 1939 he entered Moore Theological College. His studies were put in abeyance after his enlistment in the AIF in 1940.

Geoffrey's experience of war was life-changing. He was decorated with the Military Medal and also mentioned in despatches. He was badly wounded in action on Singapore Island, hospitalised and taken to Changi POW Camp.

He returned to Australia in 1946 and was suddenly hailed as one of the new generation of short story writers. In a few years the Bulletin had published 34 of his stories and he had won a prize in the Sydney Morning Herald literary competition. He was also published in other journals and the ABC broadcast many of his stories.

He married Laurel Chapman in 1946 and they moved to a farm on the north coast of NSW. Eventually he returned to his theological studies and was ordained into the Anglican Church.

He served as rector at the Garrison Church Miller's Point until 1957 and then became a missionary in West Pakistan. He returned to Australia in 1966 and was appointed Principal of the Bible College of South Australia. In the early 1970's he founded New Creation Publications and Teaching Ministry and returned to writing with great enthusiasm.

He has published numerous volumes of short stories and has seen his work published in some fine journals and compilations.

Geoffrey and Laurel Bingham live in the Adelaide Hills. He is currently writing with that immense vigour which has so characterised his previous work.

Geoffrey has great ability in grasping what lies at the heart of our faith and in explaining such in non-technical and readable terms. All his books have the stamp of reverence for truth, loyalty to the Bible, and love for the Saviour. There is imagination in his handling of well-worn themes and sometimes they map out a highly original line of approach.

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